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University of Pisa and Bagni di Lucca
August 31st - September 1st, 2006*

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PART I

PAPERS FROM THE CHARLES LEVER
BICENTENARY CONFERENCE

University of Pisa and Bagni di Lucca
August 31st - September 1st, 2006



Charles Lever
(Dublin 1806 - Trieste 1872)

TONY BAREHAM

PREFACE

These essays have been collected and edited from the papers delivered at the Charles Lever International Conference held at the University of Pisa and at Bagni di Lucca on August 31st and September 1st, 2006. They commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of Lever's birth.

The invited speakers possessed very diverse points of interest. Thus, Donnell Deeny is a graduate of Lever's *alma mater*, Trinity College, Dublin. He is a High Court Judge, and is also ex-Chairman of the Northern Ireland Arts Council, and a passionate bibliophile. He has the only known complete collection of Lever first editions in private hands. Tom Stark is a distinguished economist who got drawn for the first time ever into literary studies through conversation whilst Tony Bareham built a (not very straight) garden wall with him. The historian George Boyce has written elegantly and informatively about Lever and landlordism, and fills in the ground between Tom Stark's account of the 'MONE'¹ school of Irish economic historians, and more conventional literary studies.

Bob Barnard, in addition to being an award-winning detective novelist, is a respected Brontë scholar and an ex-academic. Valerie Lester is a direct descendant of Hablot Browne (Phiz) and had many a happy exchange with the co-editor of these papers whilst she was working on the Lever chapter for her book, *The Man Who Drew Dickens*. Recently retired as Lord Northcliffe Professor of Modern English at University College London, John Sutherland needs no introduction to anyone who has been engaged with studies of the Victorian novel. He is equally well known through his regular column in *The Guardian*, and his frequent appearances on literary programmes on the BBC. He also chaired the Booker Prize judges a couple of years ago. Tony Bareham edited *Charles Lever: New*

1. MONE (Most Oppressed Nation Ever). An acronym jocularly employed by revisionist economists and historians to define the 'classic' account, both in literature and in economic history, of nineteenth century Ireland, in which all the island's ills were *ipso facto* the fault of the British, resulting in conditions unparalleled anywhere else for vicious oppression, political partiality, and heartless neglect. Whilst no Englishman could or should be proud of his Government's treatment of nineteenth century Ireland, the 'Mone school' case has frequently been taken to excess. This has vitiated both political and literary judgments.

Evaluations in 1991, and has continued to strive (sometimes, he feels, single-handedly) to keep alive the perception of Lever as a major and neglected Victorian novelist.

The 2006 Lever Conference received generous support from the Borough Council of Coleraine, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland; from Lynchpin Tours of Portrush, County Antrim, Northern Ireland; and from the British Academy, through a travel grant awarded to Dr Bareham. There was also financial support both from the University of Pisa and the Municipal authorities of Bagni di Lucca: their hospitality in this delightful Spa will long be remembered by all concerned.

Special mention must be made of the encouragement, the support, and the patience offered by Professor Mario Curreli of the Dipartimento di Anglistica at the University of Pisa. Over a period of many months, Professor Curreli devoted friendly attention to the organization of this gathering amidst far more pressing concerns as Direttore of the Dipartimento. Without the warmth and patience of his support the event could not have taken place. And he was a wonderfully kind and hospitable mentor to the co-editor and his late wife on a visit prior to the Conference, as well as throughout the period of the Conference itself. His conducted walking tour of Pisa was a high point for all of us, and the visit he arranged to the Villa Mansi (probable setting for some scenes in Lever's novel *One of Them*) enabled us to round off the academic proceedings in a most congenial manner, with readings from the novelist's works in the grounds of the Villa. Here we were indebted to the skills of Des Cranston, whose experience as broadcaster and as thespian served to provide a lively and professional finale to the Conference.

Without the support of Wendy Doherty, from the Centro Linguistico Interfacoltà of the University of Pisa, the Conference would assuredly have foundered. Wendy mediated between the co-editor's frequent administrative incompetence and Mario Curreli's need to have things in good order. Not only did she carry out many of the less glamorous administrative tasks required for such an international gathering, but she accompanied the Conference on its travels, and served most patiently and skillfully as translator.

Lowell Courtney, of Lynchpin Tours (Ireland) Ltd., made a most generous personal donation to Conference funds – at a time when more conventional sources of funding were ignoring all correspondence addressed to them about Lever.

I hope that the author himself would have approved of the two days' activities, both the festive and the scholarly. All of us participating added to

our appreciation of Lever's work, and certainly enhanced our respect for his skill; and by virtue of sharing in such a generous spirit our diverse academic 'specialisms', we all enriched our understanding of the breadth of interest implicit in the novels. Charles Lever is, at his best, so very much better than the unfortunate neglect his output has encountered. If the published version of our proceedings brings new enthusiasts to the fold, I shall be pleased. Were it, or some other happening, to restore him to his rightful place among the pantheon of Victorian prose masters, it would be no more than justice.

TONY BAREHAM

A NOTE ON LEVER EDITIONS

There are several collected editions of Lever's works. Chapman & Hall issued 'A New Edition' in 1872-73. Since they were the original publishers of much of Lever's work, this edition has the sanction at least of their own previous copy of Lever's text. But it is very rare indeed to find a complete run of all volumes of this edition. Routledge issued *The Harry Lorrequer Edition* (1877-79), and re-issued this at least twice in the 1880s and 90s. Complete runs are scarce, the quality of presentation is poor and not all the original illustrations are present. In America, Little, Brown & Co issued the complete novels in various guises, 1892 onwards. This edition curtails the original illustrations in many volumes. Tauchnitz published each novel as it appeared, in his *Collection of British Authors*, but copies are infrequent, often priced way above their intrinsic value, and there are no illustrations. Complete sets of Lever from any publisher are hard to come by. The editor of any critical work about Lever thus has a choice between accessibility and quality when choosing a text from which to rationalize all quotations for a collection of essays by diverse authors.

To assist readers who cannot access the edition chosen as my textual basis, I have also provided the chapter number for each substantial quotation made in the various essays below, thus enabling reference to be traced to any edition. All textual references throughout these essays are to the following edition: *The Novels of Charles Lever*, 37 volumes. Edited by his Daughter. London: Downey & Co Ltd., 1897-99.

This edition, most handsomely presented, and containing all the original illustrations to each text (and some specially commissioned), includes an Introductory Note in each volume, detailing first appearance of the novel in question. It also includes the 'New Biographical Introduction' that Lever commenced attaching to his novels in the late 1860s (but never completed). The bibliographical notes in each are helpful for the main part, but do contain a few errors of fact.

Whilst this edition, like all the others, has minor textual variants when collated with first edition texts, the differences are not significant. The early novels mainly made their first appearance in parts and/or as monthly serials, in many cases transmitted from an author on the Continent to a pub-

lisher in Dublin or London, via the Diplomatic Bag (which was not entirely reliable; at least twice an episode got lost and had to be re-written from memory). Lever himself, working under great pressure, and often, in mid-career, writing two books at the same time, was not always punctilious about textual consistency. He did make some textual alterations to a few of the novels as they appeared in the Tauchnitz edition. The 'definitive' text of Lever has never been established.

A check-list of first appearance of all Lever's novels, with brief description of original publishers' cloth casing forms an appendix to this collection of essays.

The following works are referred to frequently throughout these essays:

Edmund Downey, *Charles Lever: His Life in His Letters*, 2 vols. (London & Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1906).

W. J. Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Charles Lever* [New Edition, Revised], London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1884).

Lionel Stevenson, *Dr Quicksilver: The Life of Charles Lever* (London, Chapman & Hall, 1939) [Though hard to find, this is by far and away the most comprehensive and reliable account of Lever and his work].

These are consistently abbreviated to Downey, Fitzpatrick, Stevenson.

The following are also relevant:

Tony Bareham (ed.), *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (Gerard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991).

Stephen Haddelsey, *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian* (Gerard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000).

TONY BAREHAM

CHARLES LEVER: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Charles James Lever was born in Dublin on August 31st, 1806. His father was a well-to-do builder in the city, but Charles always evinced literary and thespian talents. He seems from an early age to have been a gifted raconteur and wit, with a penchant for practical joking. These characteristics inform the early novels and helped to make them extremely popular in a world where he vied for attention with Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and the host of talented novelists who made the Victorian period so rich.

His career at Trinity College, Dublin, was protracted (almost certainly by his lack of earnest commitment to study), and he eventually qualified as a medical doctor by a slightly backdoor route (see Donnell Deeny's essay on Lever's education in this collection). There was a sketchily documented visit by Lever to Canada in 1829 or 1830, and his hairsbreadth escape by canoe from captivity among the local Indians has become part of the Lever mythology (see Downey, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp 55 seq.). His Canadian travels enrich the narrative of several novels – *Arthur O'Leary*, *Roland Cashel*, *Con Cregan* and *the Knight of Gwynne*. The restlessness which marked much of his later career, and the concern to bring an international theme to his work was thus early evinced.

His medical studies were completed by 1832 and his first post as doctor was to the cholera-stricken town of Kilrush in County Clare. Four months later he applied for and obtained the post of Dispensary Doctor at Portstewart in County Londonderry, where he remained for five years and where he commenced his first novel, *Harry Lorrequer*. He was influenced by W. H. Maxwell, populariser of the early Victorian taste for comic military novels and author, *inter alia*, of *Wild Sports of The West*. Lever's experiences of the extrovert society he found in the West of Ireland, together with his natural extravagant sense of fun, found a good home in his early fiction, but severely antagonized the dour Presbyterian Establishment which dominated Portstewart. Lever and Maxwell organized the annual town regatta, and stories abound of Lever's ebullient behaviour (see the early chapters of Downey, Fitzpatrick, and Foster for detail).

Between 1837 and 1841 he was in Brussels, trying to make a living as a physician, but literary aspirations were taking over from his not terribly

successful efforts as a doctor. From 1842 until 1845 he was Editor of the *Dublin University Magazine (DUM)*. 'Maga' enjoyed its period of widest circulation under his editorship, but it was never a task to which his wayward and sometimes self-centred nature could warm. He made as many enemies as friends at this time, and became the victim of attacks by the Nationalist novelists of the day – especially William Carleton – who took offence at what they perceived as a heavily 'Establishment' bias in the work of Lever as Anglo-Irish Protestant, and figurehead of the Tory-minded *DUM*. Lever was accused of vulgarizing and cheapening the Irish peasant in novels perceived by his adversaries to be totally biased in favour of middle-class Protestant interests.

The gross unfairness of these strictures helped to drive Lever out of his Editorship and abroad once more. The attacks were unwarranted because they willfully refused to perceive how generously and perceptively Lever treated Irish peasant characters. Micky Free (*Charles O'Malley*), Darby The Blast (*Tom Burke of 'Ours'*), and Tipperary Joe (*Jack Hinton*) are warmly sympathetic studies of the underprivileged but loyal Irish peasant. They are richly characterful in the same kindly and un-patronizing spirit that led Dickens to create Sam Weller and his cockney like. Furthermore, when Carleton launched his attack on Lever, only the five earliest novels had been written. His strictures can have no relevance to the vast bulk of Lever's writing. But Carleton's partial and splenetic comments have hung on to bedevil even some recent studies of the author, and to sour relationships between dispassionate admirers of Lever's work and powerful pressure groups, which seem to believe nothing good was written in Ireland in the nineteenth century, unless it was Catholic and anti-British in its bias. This seems even to have permeated the reaction of Lever's own University to the Anniversary Conference, at which Trinity College Dublin chose not to be represented, and more egregiously, to ignore all pertinent correspondence.

Between 1845, when he relinquished the editorship of the *DUM*, and 1847, when he settled in Florence, Lever trailed his family and entourage around Germany and Italy, at least once having his travelling menagerie mistaken for a visiting circus! Florence was, of course, the residence of many English expatriate literary figures – the Brownings and the Trollopes being its leading lights. The city provided a congenial base for literati seeking a cheaper life-style than England afforded, and Lever was soon a notable part of this world. Like most of the English ex-pats from the days of Byron and Shelley onwards, the mid-Victorian poets and novelists decamped to Bagni di Lucca during the summer months to escape the Florentine heat.

A plaque on the wall of the building where Lever's house stood still commemorates the novelist's years in Bagni. (Hopefully may soon a similar plaque commemorate his years in Portstewart!). Most of his compatriots lived in Bagni di Lucca itself; Lever lodged himself at the bottom of the hill, only a stone's throw from the Casino. This was one of the great attractions, for Lever was a congenital gambler, both at cards and at the early form of roulette that seems to have been invented in the casino at Bagni di Lucca. His prodigal life style, and his gambling combined to leave him permanently stretched for money. He tried to support his family by the regular appearance of new novels – sometimes two a year, and dispatched in episodes often well behind what he had been paid for.

In 1858 he engineered his appointment as Vice Consul at La Spezia, a scarcely-taxing post he held until 1867 when he was appointed Consul at Trieste. Both posts were a result of grace-and-favour bestowed by Tory governments, though neither prevented Lever's later novels being replete with studies of corrupt, inefficient and sinister members of the *corps diplomatique*.

His wife Kate, who had been in ill-health for many years, died in Trieste in 1870, leaving Lever utterly bereft. This blow followed the death in 1863 of his only son Charles, who is buried in the English cemetery in Florence. Charles junior had made tragic inroads into his father's good-nature and his pocket. The youngster was unable to settle to anything. He seems to have tried to live in real life the harum-scarum existence that Lever accords to the young men in his early fiction. The result was disappointment after disappointment for Lever, as first the Army, and then civil engineering failed to hold Charles junior to a stable career. The harrowing anxiety and expense this caused Lever may well be a factor in the darkening tone of his later novels.

He survived his wife by two years. Latterly the handsome figure represented in Samuel Lover's portrait that forms the frontispiece to *Jack Hinton* had become a bloated, dropsical invalid, preternaturally worn out by grief and anxiety. The dedication to his wife in his last novel, *Lord Kilgobbin*, is a sad, sad, valediction to an art which had grown and flourished over thirty years. Lever turned himself from a minor and derivative storyteller into a strong and original voice, in which a mingling of politics, adventure and shrewd character assessment gives serious strength to the later novels. Bob Barnard's essay herein on *The Martins of Cro'Martin* very neatly encapsulates Lever's strengths and weaknesses. He 'did' people and places supremely well – his young women are consistently a tour de force among the often vapid females of the Victorian norm, and nobody has ever captured more successfully the storm-tossed but unforgettable scenery of

North Antrim and Derry, which he still recalls so memorably after an absence of thirty years, and makes so potent in books like *Tony Butler* and *One of Them*. Self-confessedly, he was poor at plotting a convincing narrative from beginning to end. He can resort to melodrama, and to stock fictional devices fifty years out of date by the time he deploys them. You do not read Charles Lever principally for the story, you read him for the people and the places that hold together the fabric of his narrative. But so strong is he as a student of character, and so charismatic as a painter of scenery, that those of us who sincerely admire his books can readily forget the stagey and old fashioned plotting and the huddled endings. The rewards greatly outweigh the frustrations in reading Lever. The more pity that he has sometimes been the victim of such absurd prejudice and such partial judgment among critics in his homeland.

TONY BAREHAM

A CHECKLIST OF THE APPEARANCE
OF CHARLES LEVER'S NOVELS IN PARTS, IN SERIAL,
AND IN FIRST VOLUME ISSUE WITH A BRIEF
ACCOUNT OF FIRST EDITION PUBLISHERS' BINDINGS

HARRY LORREQUER

(Anonymously) in *Dublin University Magazine*, February 1837-February 1840.

Monthly parts, in pink wrappers. March 1839-January 1840. Illustrations by Phiz.

Dublin: William Curry, Jr. & Co., MDCCCXXXIX. Different bindings for successive re-issues, all dated as above.

i) green horizontal-ribbed cloth. Sides blocked in blind. Spine blocked in gilt with, in top third, a guardsman holding a pennant blowing left to right, which contains the title. The guardsman's right arm, supporting the pennant staff, is foreshortened, and his sword is straight. He stands on a triangular base. Bright yellow endpapers. Publishers' ads included. May well be first issue in book form from stripped parts.

ii) green diaper diagonal-ribbed or sand-grained cloth. Sides blocked in blind. The spine has blind bands at head and foot and, blocked in gilt near the top, is the figure of an Irishman with harp, and a flag blowing right to left which contains the title. Pale yellow coated endpapers. Because there are no publishers' ads in these copies they are probably cases supplied by the publisher for parts already purchased.

iii) green horizontal-ribbed cloth. Sides blocked blind with multiple borders. Lavish blind-blocked patterning within these frames. On the spine the guardsman's forearm holding the pennant staff is elongated. His sabre is curved, and he stands on a rectangular base.

iv a) maroon/brown sand-grained cloth. Sides blocked in blind with a three-lined frame, and decorative designs swirling down from near top and bottom. Spine has blind-blocked decorated bands, and gilt lettering in fancy capitals, thus: CONFESIONS | OF | HARRY | LORREQUER. Pale yellow endpapers.

iv b) Same maroon/brown cloth, but sides blocked with one-line frame and blind-blocked designs continuing right round inside the border. Spine lettered as (iv a) above.

iv c) maroon vertical bold-ribbed cloth. Otherwise as (iv a) above.

CHARLES O'MALLEY

(‘Edited by Harry Lorrequer’). Serial in *DUM*, March 1840-December 1841.

Undated monthly parts in pink wrappers. March 1840-December 1841. Illustrations by Phiz.

Dublin: William Curry, Jr., Edinburgh: Fraser & Crawford, London: W. S. Orr & Co., MDCCCXLI. In two volumes.

Dark green cloth, blocked blind on sides with a mounted dragoon; a standing dragoon gilt-stamped on spine; volume number inset into his sabretache; in his right hand a pennant which bears the title CHARLES O'MALLEY THE IRISH DRAGOON. Then: Vol. I (Vol. II), in gilt at the foot of the spine. Yellow endpapers.

JACK HINTON

Serial in *DUM*, March 1842-December 1842.

13 monthly parts, January 1842-January 1843. In pink wrappers. Illustrations by Phiz.

Curry, Orr, Fraser, MDCCCXLIII

First appearance was under the generic title ‘Our Mess’: Lever intended a series of stories to appear thus, but only *Jack Hinton* and *Tom Burke* did so. This first issue has ‘Our Mess’ title page. The second issue a year later did not carry this generic title.

a): Rose-madder fine-ribbed cloth, blocked in blind and gilt with martial emblems; pale yellow coated endpapers.

b): moiré horizontally-ribbed rose-madder cloth, ruled, blocked, and lettered (all from type) on spine; yellow coated endpapers.

This is not a secondary, but rather an alternative style to the more elaborate cases provided for those who purchased all three volumes of ‘Our Mess’ simultaneously.

TOM BURKE OF ‘OURS’

a) 20 monthly parts, in pink wrappers. February 1843-September 1844. Illustrated by Phiz. Two parts issued as double numbers.

Curry, Orr, Fraser. MDCCCXLIV. In two volumes.

Title page designates *Tom Burke* as Vol. II of ‘Our Mess’ (vide supra).

Alternative bindings as for *Jack Hinton*, above.

ARTHUR O'LEARY

Serial in *DUM* January-December 1843.

London: Henry Colburn, 1844. In three volumes. Illustrated by George Cruikshank.

Contents slightly recast and rearranged.

Green fine-ribbed cloth. Sides ruled and blocked blind with central motif surrounded by outer curlicues. Blind-blocked bands on spine with gilt lettering: rule | ARTHUR | O'LEARY | rule | Vol. I. (II.), (III.) Primrose endpapers.

1845. One volume, with further re-castings of text and with further additions.

THE O'DONOGHUE

Eleven monthly parts, issued by Curry, January-November 1845.

Curry, Orr, Fraser, 1845. Scarlet morocco cloth, blocked blind on sides, spine elaborately blocked in gilt.

TALES OF THE TRAINS

Orr & Co., Curry & Co., six one-penny parts in decorated wrappers (undated). Individual parts have title page dated 1845.

Orr & Co., Curry & Co. One volume. MDCCCXLV. On-page illustrations by Phiz.

Red ripple cloth. Ruled and blocked in blind on front with ornamental margin surrounding a central design. Within this a gilt-stamped railway-engine. Gilt lettering TALES OF above and THE TRAINS below this engine. Spine with gilt designs, and title lettered in gilt: TALES | OF THE | TRAINS. No author or publisher's imprint on spine. Back blocked in blind. Endpapers pale yellow. All edges gilt.

NUTS AND NUTCRACKERS

Sporadic contributions to *DUM*, January 1842-May 1844.

Orr & Co., Curry & Co. One volume. MDCCCXLV. Illustrated by Phiz.

Scarlet fine-grain cloth. Front blocked in blind with marginal pattern all round. Gilt vignette blocked on front, comprising ornamental fantasy of letters and figures. Spine blocked in gilt, with a bunch of filberts, then in fantasy capitals: NUTS | AND NUT | CRACKERS. Then, two puppet heads looking inwards and representing the ends of anthropomorphized nutcrackers. Then: 1845 | rule | and gargoyle head at base of spine, representing fulcrum of crackers. Blocked blind on back. Endpapers coated pale primrose.

ST PATRICK'S EVE

Chapman & Hall, 186 Strand. MDCCCXLV. Illustrated by Phiz.

Fine-ribbed drab-green cloth. Sides blocked in blind around margins with trellis design intertwined with shamrocks, and culminating in a blind-

blocked harp in each corner. Central motif gilt-stamped on front comprises a female figure seated with harp and surrounded by ornamental motifs. Elaborate gilt-stamped lettering reads 'St Patrick's' above central motif, and 'Eve' below it. Spine embodies the harpist and shamrock motifs, again gilt-stamped. Lettering reads: ST | PATRICK'S | EVE | BY | CHA^S LEVER | with 'Patrick's' and 'Eve' set at an angle. Pale yellow endpapers.

Two later variants recorded with slightly different blocking.

THE KNIGHT OF GWYNNE

Twenty monthly parts, January 1846-July 1847, issued by Chapman & Hall. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall, 186, Strand, MDCCCLVII.

Vertically fine-ribbed rose madder cloth blocked blind on sides, blocked and lettered gilt on spine, with title and author in fancy frame. No imprint. Endpapers coated pale yellow.

SIR JASPER CAREW

In *DUM*, sporadically, July 1852-June 1854.

Thomas Hodgson, 13 Paternoster Row. 1855. Vol. cxxiii of Hodgson's *Parlour Library*. No illustrations. Standard *Parlour Library* binding.

HORACE TEMPLETON

Chapman & Hall, 1848. Two volumes. No illustrations.

Dark green fine-diaper cloth. Blocked in blind, lettered in gilt.

CON CREGAN

Fourteen undated monthly parts. Illustrated by Phiz.

Orr & Co, Two vols., n. d. [1849].

Red morocco cloth. Sides ruled and blocked in blind. Spines blocked in gilt with figure of a giant standing astride a globe, balancing on his forehead a ladder from which are tumbling people and objects. Title and volume number blocked in gilt at top of spine. No author's name or publisher's imprint. Endpapers very pale yellow.

ROLAND CASHEL

Monthly parts, May 1848-November 1849. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall, MDCCCL.

Dark plum ripple-grained cloth. Sides blocked in blind. On spine the title, in fancy lettering and produced on the curve, and the author, are enclosed in a decorative oval frame, blocked in gilt, as is the figure of 'Mari-

tana' (taken from the frontispiece of the novel itself) and which appears on the tail of the spine.

THE DALTONS

Monthly parts, May 1850-April 1852. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall. 2 vols. 1852.

Dark brown ripple-grained cloth. Sides blocked in blind with elaborate swirly border pattern. Six panels of bands and swirls blind-blocked in patterns on spine. Lettered in gilt on spine. No publisher's imprint on spine. Yellow endpapers.

THE DODD FAMILY ABROAD

Monthly parts, September 1852-April 1854. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall, MDCCCIV.

Light chocolate brown ripple-grained cloth. Sides elaborately blocked in blind, unlettered. Spine gilt-blocked with title in fancy lettering and contained within an ornamental oval frame. At tail of spine, in plain gilt-blocked lettering: LONDON. | CHAPMAN AND HALL. Yellow endpapers

MAURICE TIERNAY

Serial in *DUM*, April 1850-December 1851. No illustrations.

Thomas Hodgson n.d. (1854?), (anonymously). Vol. cxix of Hodgson's 'Parlour Library'. Alternative bindings:

a) Green glazed printed boards in standard 'Parlour Library' format for the 2/- version.

b) Cloth binding for the 2/6 version: very dark green cloth of fine vertical-line grain. Sides heavily embossed with central device bearing the series name on both front and rear. Yellow endpapers. The spine has fancy gilt patterns, and is lettered AUTHOR | OF | MAURICE | TIERNAY and, lower down, SIR | JASPER | CAREW.

THE MARTINS OF CRO'MARTIN

Monthly parts, December 1854-June 1856. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall, MDCCCLVI.

Green morocco cloth, blocked in blind and gilt.

THE FORTUNES OF GLENCORE

Serial in *DUM* irregularly, August 1855-April 1857.

Chapman & Hall. Three volumes. MDCCCLVII. No illustrations.

Bright green straight morocco cloth ruled and blocked in blind on sides with leaf design inside margins. Blocked and lettered fancy inside sham-rock cartouche, and with short rule gilt on spine. LONDON | CHAPMAN AND HALL | rule | at tail of spine. Endpapers coated yellow.

GERALD FITZGERALD THE CHEVALIER

Serial in *DUM* January-July 1859.

Harper & Bros, *Library of Select Novels*, 2 vols. (1859).

Downey & Co. Ltd. and New Amsterdam Book Company 1899.

Green canvas, blocked and lettered in gilt on sides and spine. Cases for both English and American issue bear Downey's imprint on spine.

DAVENPORT DUNN

Monthly parts, July 1857-April 1859. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall, MDCCCLIX.

Plum ripple-grain cloth. Blocked blind on sides; blocked in gilt and lettered on spine, with the title and author contained in an ornamental medallion, roughly hexagonal in shape. Rich yellow coated endpapers.

ONE OF THEM

Monthly parts, December 1859-January 1861. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall, MDCCCLXI

Blue bead grain cloth, blocked in blind on sides; blocked in gilt and lettered in gilt and in reverse on spine; pale yellow endpapers.

BARRINGTON

Monthly parts, February 1862-January 1863. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall, 1863.

Purple-brown cloth heavily stippled with large dot pattern. Blocked in blind on sides with heavy ornamental frame. Blind-stamped design near tail of spine. Spine lettered within ornamental frame in gilt. Publisher's imprint, gilt, at tail. Pale cream endpapers.

A DAY'S RIDE

Serial in *All The Year Round*, 18 August 1860-23 March 1861.

Chapman & Hall, two volumes, 1863. (It is customary to cite copies with 'Second Edition' on the title page as actually First Edition. This is

wrong, however. Copies are known *without* this rubric).

Green dot-and-line grained cloth. Blind frames, gilt lettering.

LUTTRELL OF ARRAN

Monthly parts, December 1863-February 1865. Pink wrappers. Illustrated by Phiz.

Chapman & Hall, MDCCCLXV.

Dark plum sand-grained cloth. Blocked in blind with elaborate patterns within several ruled borders on sides. Panelled blind and lettered gilt on spine designating author and title. Lettered: LONDON | CHAPMAN AND HALL in plain gilt capitals at tail of spine.

TONY BUTLER

Serial in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October 1863-January 1865.

William Blackwood & Son, Edinburgh, MDCCCLXV. 3 vols. Without illustrations.

Green sand-grained cloth. Sides ruled with blind margins. Gilt blocked spine reads (double rule) TONY | BUTLER | (short rule) | Vol. I. | (II.) (III.) | (design) | Wm. Blackwood & Sons | Edinburgh & London. | (double rule). Chocolate endpapers.

SIR BROOK FOSSBROOK

Serial in *Blackwood's Magazine*, May 1865-December 1866.

William Blackwood & Sons, MDCCCLXVI. Three volumes. Without illustrations.

Blue sand-grained cloth. Sides blocked blind. Blocked and lettered gilt on spine.

THE BRAMLEIGHS OF BISHOP'S FOLLY

Serial in *Cornhill Magazine*, June 1867-October 1868.

Smith, Elder & Co. 1868. Three volumes. Without illustrations.

Dark plum sand-grained cloth. Blocked in blind on sides. Blocked and lettered in gilt on spine.

PAUL GOSSLETT'S CONFESSIONS

Serial (anonymously) in *St Paul's Magazine*, March-May 1868.

London: Virtue & Co., New York: Virtue & Yorston, 1868. One illustration by Marcus Stone.

Bright blue sand-grain cloth. Blind-stamped margins, and lettered and decorated in gilt on sides. The spine has the title up-lettered in gilt, but no author or imprint. Pale yellow endpapers.

THAT BOY OF NORCOTT'S

Serial (anonymously) in *Cornhill Magazine*, November 1868-March 1869.

Smith, Elder & Co., 1869. Five illustrations by Mary Ellen Edwards.

Smooth apple-green cloth. Blocked blind on sides. Blocked and lettered in gilt on spine.

A RENT IN A CLOUD

Chapman & Hall, n. d. [1869].

No copy traced in original cloth.

LORD KILGOBBIN

Serial in *Cornhill Magazine*, October 1870-March 1872. Illustrated by Luke Fildes.

Smith, Elder & Co., 1872. Three volumes. Without illustrations.

First one volume edition, 1872, containing the Luke Fildes illustrations.

Darl green dotted-line-ribbed cloth. Blocked in black on sides. Blocked in black, lettered in gilt on spine.

CORNELIUS O'DOWD UPON MEN WOMEN AND OTHER THINGS IN GENERAL

Three volumes of selected essays that Lever contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine*.

First Series: Edinburgh & London: Blackwood, MDCCCLXIV

Second Series: " " " MDCCCLXV

Third Series: " " " MDCCCLXVI

Dark green sand-grained cloth, blocked on sides with blind margins. Facsimile autograph in gilt on front. Spine blocked fancy in gilt with title, series number and publisher. Bevelled edges.

MARIO CURRELI

CHARLES LEVER:
A TWO-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM

This international symposium, sponsored by the Dipartimento di Anglistica and jointly hosted by the University of Pisa and the Town Council of Bagni di Lucca, was held on August 31st and September 1st, 2006, to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the Victorian novelist Charles Lever and rescue his life and literary production from unjust oblivion.¹ Almost completely unknown so far to readers in this country, Lever's artistic personality and literary output were only recently introduced to the Italian public by Franco Marucci's extensive treatment of "Novelists and Prose-Writers before Dickens" in his prestigious *Storia della Letteratura Inglese*.²

During our Tuscan Symposium, held on the bicentenary of Charles Lever's birth (whose actual birth date is August 31, 1806), in addition to being offered the possibility of deepening and sharing their knowledge of the Victorian novelist's life and works, delegates were allowed time for a guided tour of the old university town of Pisa and of picturesque Bagni di Lucca. To the latter tourist resort they proceeded on the second day of the conference, when one of the sessions was hosted in the local Town Library, housed in the former Anglican Church, and speakers were sumptuously dined in the *Ristoro del Viaggiatore*.

Raised by Anglo-Irish parents in Dublin, where he graduated from Trinity College, Ireland's oldest University, Charles Lever spent much of his creative life in Italy, settling first in Como and Florence, with a long stay at Bagni di Lucca, then in La Spezia and latterly in Trieste; several of his novels and sketches have in fact overtly Tuscan or Ligurian settings. For instance, in his historical novel *Gerald Fitzgerald: The Chevalier* – serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* from January to July 1859, but omitted from the collected edition of his works Lever was rearranging shortly before he died – we may follow the Catholic Pretender's movements through central Italy, between Rome and Florence, Orvieto and the Roman Maremma. In *One of Them* (1861), written in La Spezia and serialised in

1. I would like to acknowledge the generous contributions received from the University of Pisa and its Faculty of Foreign Literatures, the Comune of Bagni di Lucca, the British Academy, Coleraine Borough Council, the Irish Tourist Board, Lynchpin Tours (Mr Lowell Courtney), and the owners of Villa Mansi at Marlia.

2. F. Marucci, *Storia della Letteratura Inglese dal 1832 al 1870, Tomo II: Il Romanzo* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2003), pp. 69-70.

Dickens's *All the Year Round*, the scene opens at Café Doney in Florence, moves, among other places, to the Baths at Lucca, and thence to a well-known villa in nearby Marlia, before returning to Florence – for a drive round the Cascine in chapter XXXII, and a masquerade at the Pergola (ch. XXXVI) – and proceeding to Palazzo Balbi in Rome (ch. XLIX).

Charles Lever spent much of his life abroad, travelling extensively in Europe and Canada, very likely agreeing with what Thomas Moore said of Ireland, “It’s a beautiful country to live out of”.³ From 1851 he lived nominally in La Spezia, and was British vice-Consul there from 1858 to 1867. He wrote: “Since my arrival here we have lived on the water, the delicious blue waves of the Gulf. Of all the spots I have ever seen, Spezzia [sic] is the most beautiful.” He was an inveterate gambler and a frequent patron of the Casino in Bagni di Lucca, where, like Dostoevsky’s gambler, he dilapidated a fortune to the sound of “*Noir perde et passe*” and may often have concurred with what one of his characters has to admit in *Jack Hinton* (1843):

The horrible indifference the players had shown to the sufferings of this wretched man so thoroughly disgusted me that I could no longer bear even to look on the game; the passion of play had shown itself to me now in all its most repulsive forms, and I turned with abhorrence from the table.⁴

Lever’s writing was assisted by the tranquil beauty of his cottage overlooking the Gulf of La Spezia – from where he witnessed horrified its transformation into Italy’s largest naval base – and by the green peace of Bagni di Lucca, one of Europe’s oldest Spas, where the most fashionable people used to resort, and where local authorities have done him the honour of a commemorative plaque on the wall of the house he lived in, at Ponte al Serraglio. During the centuries – after making their first appearance in English literature when they were mentioned by John Webster in *The Duchess of Malfi* as “the wells at Lucca” (II:i, 65) – these Baths hosted and inspired Montaigne, Goethe and Heine, the Shelleys and the Brownings, Landor and James, Vernon Lee and Ouida (who is buried in the local British cemetery). Of this pleasant watering-place, surrounded by one of the finest sceneries of the higher Apennines, where the Lima torrent winds its impetuous way through green forests and at the bottom of deep ravines,

3. Quoted in of *One of Them* by one of the characters, to which another one adds “And *he* was a patriot!” (ch. XIX, p. 192). Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Lever’s works come from the Downey edition of *The Novels of Charles Lever*, 37 Volumes. Edited by his Daughter. London: Downey & Co Ltd., 1897-99 (see, in this volume, Tony Bareham’s detailed bibliographical note on Lever editions).

4. C. Lever, *Jack Hinton: The Guardsman* (ed. cit.), p. 548.

Lever wrote: “The saunter after tea time... generally along that little river that tumbles through the valley of the Bagni di Lucca, was the usual preparation for my night’s work...” Elsewhere he described Bagni di Lucca as “a village... set in sweet, pretty country.”

Having spent his last years as British Consul in Trieste (where he died in 1872), Lever was acquainted with many of the leading figures in contemporary Italian politics, from Guerrazzi to Garibaldi. Breakfasting with the latter at La Spezia, he tried to make his guest less enthusiastic about the excesses of Irish Fenianism. Charles Lever was also a brilliant essayist and several of his writings deal with the struggle for Italian independence.

In one of the table talks that Lever – surprisingly, one of Marx’s favourite authors⁵ – contributed to *Blackwood’s Magazine* and then collected in his *Cornelius O’Dowd*, the Anglo-Irish novelist offered a description of Garibaldi imprisoned in the fortress of Varignano, in the Gulf of La Spezia. After the General was wounded in the foot and thigh, and captured during his unsuccessful Aspromonte campaign, it was only thanks to a public subscription organised by Lady Palmerston, the Prime Minister’s wife, that Garibaldi’s British admirers were able to give a special adjustable orthopædic bed to their Hero lying wounded in prison near La Spezia:

[...] the poor wounded sufferer would have fared very ill, had it not been for the provident kindness and care of his friends in England, who supplied him with everything he could want and a great deal he could by no possibility make use of. [...] there was something very noble and very touching in this spontaneous sympathy of a whole people, and so Garibaldi felt it.⁶

Displaying a vein for humour that raises him to Pickwickian heights, Charles Lever adds that the personal homage of Garibaldi’s British admirers or, as he calls them, “worshippers”, was an unbearable infliction on the ailing General:

It was said that a party of English ladies had arrived at the chief hotel [in La Spezia], having come as a deputation from some heaven-knows-what association in England, to see the General, and make their own report on his health, his appearance, and what they deemed his prospect of perfect recovery. [...] When their demand for admission was replied to by a reference to the general order excluding all visitors, they indignantly refused to be classed in such a category (*Ibid.*, p. 47).

Eventually, these rather importune ladies were admitted to a darkened room, in which the Immortal Hero was impersonated by his friend Dr

5. Paul Lafargue, “Souvenirs Personnels sur Karl Marx”, *Die Neue Zeit*, IX (1890-91), pp. 10-17, 37-42.

6. C. Lever, “Garibaldi’s Worshippers”, in *Cornelius O’Dowd: Upon Men and Women and Other Things in General, First Series* (Edinburgh & London: Wm Blackwood & Sons, MDCCLXIV), p. 45.

Pietro Ripari, one of the Mille, “who bore that amount of resemblance to Garibaldi which could be imparted by hair, moustache, and beard of the same yellowish-red colour, and eyes somewhat closely set” (*Ibid.*, p. 49). When the deputation of British ladies was introduced, the sight of the (supposed) General was, however, too much for most of them:

One dropped, Madonna-wise, with hands clasped across her bosom, at the foot of his bed; another fainted as she pressed the threshold; a third gained the bedside to grasp his hand, and sank down in an ecstasy of devotion to water it with her tears; while the strong-minded woman of the party took out her scissors and cut four several locks off that dear and noble head. They sobbed over him – they blubbered over him – they compared him with his photograph, and declared he was libelled – they showered cards over him to get his autograph; and when, at length, by persuasion, not unassisted by mild violence, they were induced to withdraw, they declared that, for those few moments of ecstasy, they’d have willingly made a pilgrimage to Mecca (*Ibid.*, p. 49).

This strand of his political involvement was one among the many subjects dealt with during the International Conference of Lever scholars and critics, that was opened, on August 31, 2006, at Pisa University by the inaugural lecture given by John Sutherland. Formerly Lord Northcliffe Professor of English, University College, London, this eminent critic is the author of many important studies on the nineteenth-century novel, including, quite recently, a well-known series of essays, collected in the Oxford World Classics, *Is Heathcliff a Murderer?* (1996), *Can Jane Eyre be Happy?* (1997), *Where was Rebecca Shot?* (1998), and, with Cedric Watts, *Henry V, War Criminal? & Other Shakespeare Puzzles* (2000). In his absorbing paper, after disentangling the reasons why Lever has undergone two critical devaluations, one during his lifetime, the other posthumously, Professor Sutherland convincingly traced Lever’s influence on Tolstoy and Thackeray, and his controversy with the latter, which caused Thackeray’s violent anti-Leverian campaign.

There followed three more papers, given in the Aula Magna of the Pisan Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures by other well-known Lever scholars and researchers. Bob Barnard’s “Lever’s *The Martins of Cro’-Martin*” offered an appreciation of this novel with a discussion of its distinction in Lever’s output. Professor Barnard concentrated on Lever’s special attitude to plot, how it marks him off from other Victorians, and how he transcends it in *The Martins*.

In his lecture “Lever, Landlords, and the Protestant Nation” George Boyce, Professor of Economic History, University of Wales (author of *Charles Lever among the Landlords*), explored aspects of Lever’s response to momentous changes he lived through when Ireland was transformed from a Protestant to a Catholic nation, and reflected on Lever’s nostalgia

for the golden age of the Protestant nation, especially his admiration for its cultural life. Professor Boyce showed how Lever realised that cultural brilliance was no substitute for political, social and economic power. The novelist's last years were spent in unhappy contemplation of the draining away of the power of the Protestant nation, and Lever perceived that this loss must be to the detriment of the whole of Ireland.

The Pisa session was drawn to a conclusion by Tom Stark's paper "Lever's Ireland – Fiction as Fact", which compared the scant evidence available of the economic condition of people in Lever's Ireland of the Eighteen-thirties to that outlined in his 1845 novel *St. Patrick's Eve*. Using budget expenditure data, extracted from the 1836 *Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer classes in Ireland*, supplemented by original wage and price data, Dr Stark showed that Lever was correct when he wrote that his hero Owen Connor was better off than most rural dwellers. As an economist and by way of an anecdote, Tom Stark concluded with a comparison of Charles Lever's and Adam Smith's perception of the role of 'self-interest'.

On the second day of the Conference, after the address of welcome by the Mayor of Bagni di Lucca, it was the turn of the journalist, poet, and playwright Valerie Browne Lester – author of the first full biography of Phiz and his family⁷ – to introduce and comment upon some of the remarkable illustrations her great-great-grandfather Hablot K. Browne ('Phiz') prepared for novels by Lever, as he did for Dickens, Trollope, Ainsworth, and others. Between 1897 and 1899, an entirely new and copyright Lever edition, in thirty-seven Octavo volumes with all the Phiz and Cruikshank etchings printed from the original steel plates, was typeset in Edinburgh, by Constable, for Downey of Covent Garden. Since a few of the books had originally been published without illustrations, special etchings for these volumes were commissioned from Gordon Frederick Browne – Phiz's tenth child, a frequent contributor to *Punch*, and almost as famous as his father – as well as from W. D. McCormick, Luke Fildes, and M. E. Edwards. This edition, containing all of Charles Lever's interesting Prefaces, was limited to 1000 sets and, after printing, the new bold clear type specially cast for the work was distributed.

Sir Donnell Deeny's well-informed lecture on "The Education of Charles Lever" described the various educational institutions attended by young Lever, from Wrights Academy, Great Denmark Street, Dublin – a few doors from Belvedere College, James Joyce's school – to Trinity College, regarded as the finest group of buildings in Ireland. Here, after his

7. Valerie Browne Lester, *Phiz: The Man Who Drew Dickens* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004).

first diploma, Lever received some clinical training as a medical doctor, and a B.Med. degree. Lever's own college experiences were subsequently turned to fictional effect, and Deeny's extensive quotations from Chapter 28 of *The O'Donoghue* and from *Lord Kilgobbin* served to illustrate both the novelist's education and wit.

It was then the task of Tony Bareham, editor of *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* and this Tuscan conference co-organiser, to end the Bagni session with his masterly paper "Rebels and Reactionaries". Bareham explained why Lever was drawn to peripheral and self-isolated characters, and how it is equally true that men at the political extremes fascinated him. Lever's often covertly sympathetic studies of social and political rebels – Tom Burke, Mark O'Donoghue, Daniel Donogan, for example – are surprising in an author often accused of too heavy an Establishment bias, whilst his trenchant studies of the cold-blooded and calculating figures who represent English political and social power make his narrative standpoint even more interesting. In his lecture, Tony Bareham considered the strength of character drawing and the even-handed sympathy with which Lever presents some of his social and political misfits, and contrasted these characters with representative studies of how brilliantly the novelist could pillory the vicious and heartless scions of established race and power.

Both the Bagni di Lucca session and the conference itself were closed by John Sutherland's recapitulation of the symposium's main results, whose essence was then illustrated by him in an article for the *Times Literary Supplement*.⁸

After guided visits to the monuments in the British Cemetery of Bagni di Lucca, opened in 1843, to the Casino, and to Lever's house, delegates were driven to Villa Mansi, at Marlia, the likely setting of some memorable and exhilarating scenes of *One of Them*. In the park there, a brilliant open-air reading from Lever's works was offered by Des Cranston and Tony Bareham.

By way of a conclusion, I would like to quote from another brilliant article, entitled "Scientific Congresses", originally contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* and later collected in *Cornelius O'Dowd*, in which Charles Lever states:

8. J. Sutherland, "Lever's Columns", *TLS*, 15 December 2006, p. 4. In a letter to the Editor, published in a subsequent issue of the same journal, Mr John Wood expanded Sutherland's claim of Lever's influence on Thackeray and Tolstoy, reminding readers that, in the Preface to *Major Barbara*, G. B. Shaw disclaimed the influence of Ibsen and complained that "critics never affiliate me to my countryman and immediate forerunner, Charles Lever."

When John Girder declared that whatever “was perfectly uneatable might be given to the poor,” he enunciated the grand maxim of Scientific Congresses; these wonderful meetings of world-famed men being very little else than grand gatherings for the disposal of rejected articles. What the originators of such societies intended, what they meant or hoped for when they instituted them, is clear and clean beyond me. I never yet met the man who owned he had gleaned anything from their lucubrations (p. 205).⁹

In this humorous *Blackwood's* paper, Charles Lever also maintains through his alias Cornelius: “The only bit of real cleverness I have ever detected in these ‘scientific’ swells is the choice of the place they meet in” (p. 195). Lever goes on to affirm maliciously that conference papers have usually “been returned scores of times by some quarterly or monthly” and that they are a dexterous synopsis of something done at more length elsewhere (p. 196).

While I hope delegates have enjoyed visiting for the first time or seeing again the places selected as this symposium’s venues, I feel instead sure we shall all benefit a great deal from the learned, original, papers that were presented at Pisa University and at Bagni di Lucca by so many distinguished Lever scholars and critics.

9. *Cornelius O'Dowd*, 2nd series, 1865, p. 194.

JOHN SUTHERLAND

CHARLES LEVER, W.M. THACKERAY, LEO TOLSTOY

The year 2006 saw much jubilation for John Betjeman. The year was also the double centenary of another literary figure whose anniversary has inspired sadly less notice. Charles Lever's birthday, 31 August, was celebrated, in 2006, with studious absence of Levermania at a conference attended by some two dozen admirers, at Pisa University and at Bagni di Lucca. The event was small enough, and well informed enough, to function as a Lever workshop. One of the first such, one imagines, ever. It may be a hundred years till the next.

The setting was appropriate. The novelist (whose fiction no longer sold all that wonderfully) was appointed, in his later years, to consular sinecures in Liguria (La Spezia) and then in Trieste. Friends in high places still remembered Charles Lever, if the fickle reading public did not.

In the spa town, nestled in the hills above Lucca, Lever took the waters and played the tables. It was a favourite resort of British tourists and has almost as many literary associations as Bath. The memorial conference was held in the handsomely restored (but deconsecrated) English church. There are, nowadays, almost as few Anglicans as Leverians.

Lever was, for a decade, Ireland's great novelist. He is now, as speaker after speaker at Pisa and Bagni stressed, with varying degrees of indignation, unread. Unread, but not for that reason entirely inaudible by the well read. If one's ear is attuned, echoes of Lever's fiction still resonate loudly in canonical places. His literary survival is subterranean. But Lever's distinctive contribution can be followed, I will argue, via Thackeray's greatest work of fiction to that of Tolstoy. It's a worthy, if underground, memorial. Lever was born in Dublin in 1806, the son of a building contractor from Lancashire and brought up with the social advantages, and social ambiguities, of his Anglo-Irish class. After Trinity College Dublin, he bounced around Europe and North America, gaining the reputation of a good fellow and wastrel in the making. He studied medicine in a desultory way, earning himself the sobriquet Dr Quicksilver.

Lever settled down on marrying his childhood sweetheart, Kate, in 1832. Now well on in years, he was encouraged to apply himself to literature by the novelist William Hamilton Maxwell. Lever duly took over the

editorship of the *Dublin University Magazine*. Fifteen years older, Maxwell was, like Lever, the son of a prosperous merchant with little inclination to honest labour. He too had attended TCD 'in a somewhat desultory manner'. He claimed to have seen action in the Peninsular War with the Black Watch (modern commentators, such as Royal Gettmann, have questioned this),¹ and at Waterloo where he served as a captain of infantry. Maxwell subsequently married an heiress, took orders, and settled down to the comfortable existence of a monied hunting parson as Rector of Ballagh, at Connemara. His most popular works were the semi-autobiographical *Stories of Waterloo* (1829) and *The Bivouac: Or Stories of the Peninsular War* (1834). Captain Maxwell would have a formative influence on his protégé's later career. The Revd. Maxwell less so.

The year 1836-37, when Lever turned to literature, was the highpoint of Bozmania. The proprietor of the *DUM*, William Curry, persuaded Lever to write a serial, *Harry Lorrequer*, which ran in the magazine from February 1837 and in monthly 'Dickensian' parts. Curry evidently conceived himself as Lever's Richard Bentley, and the *DUM* as *Bentley's Miscellany*. Phiz (Hablott Knight Browne), *Pickwick's* illustrator was recruited to do the full plate etchings for *Lorrequer's* monthly parts. He and Lever would eventually work together on sixteen novels – one of the great partnerships in Victorian fiction.

'You ask me how I write', Lever was once asked by John Blackwood: 'my reply is, just as I live – from hand to mouth.'² *Harry Lorrequer* began as a single anecdote and its ad hoc continuation is a narrativeless sequence of Pickwickian / picaresque episodes that take the military hero from Cork all over peacetime Europe. It hit the public taste, massively. Curry went on to suggest a variation on the theme. As Lever recalled, thirty years later:

my publishers asked me could I write a story in the Lorrequer vein, in which active service and military adventure could figure more prominently than mere civilian life and where the achievements of a British army might form the staple of the narrative. When this question was propounded me, I was ready to reply: *not one, but fifty*.³

The first of the fifty was *Charles O'Malley*, serialised in the *DUM* and in parts (illustrated by Phiz) from March 1840 to December 1841. The hero is a bravo from Galway who duels and dissipates himself at Trinity before

1. See Royal Gettmann, *A Victorian Publisher: A Study of the Bentley Papers* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1960). Gettmann gives a moving account of the destitute Maxwell's final years.

2. J.A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 165.

3. Lever's Preface to the 1872 edition of *Charles O'Malley* (1872, repr. London: Downey & Co., 1897), p. xii.

enlisting to fight in the Peninsula, rising to the rank of captain. By a series of unlikely adventures, Charley finds himself at the shoulder of Napoleon, at the beginning of Waterloo, and by the side of Wellington (to whom he gives battle-winning instruction) at the climax. Thereafter, it is peace, prosperity and the obligatory heiress. It was logical for Lever to choose Waterloo. He was in Brussels while writing the book. O'Malley is a heroic version of his literary patron and adviser, Maxwell. Phiz's father had also fought at Waterloo (the illustrations are wildly dramatic). It was generally a period at which the Napoleonic Wars were being triumphantly crowed over in Britain. Nelson's column was erected in 1843. Subscriptions were being gathered for the triumphal arch to Wellington, at the entrance to Hyde Park.

Thackeray, unlike Dickens and Lever, had still to make his mark as anything other than a penny-a-liner. He was hungry for fame and proposed to Chapman and Hall a volume of 'Cockney Sketches of Ireland' (clearly aiming at the success of the firm's *Sketches by Boz*). Thackeray procured letters of introduction to Lever, currently residing in high style in his country house, Templeogue, outside Dublin. A convivial visit ensued in early June 1842. The Waterloo chapters of *Charles O'Malley*, still fresh on the printed page, were an inevitable topic of conversation. 'Thackeray seemed much inclined to laugh at martial might', it was later recalled, 'although he still held to the idea that something might be made of Waterloo, even without the smoke and din of the action being introduced.'⁴ This was five years before the serialisation of Thackeray's 'Waterloo Novel' *Vanity Fair*.

Thackeray dedicated *The Irish Sketch Book*, when it finally came out in December 1843, to Lever who was roundly criticised for accepting the compliment. Thackeray's cockneyisms rubbed Dubliners up the wrong way. 'Nationalists have always had their doubts about Lever' one speaker observed, darkly, at the 2006 conference. They still do, apparently. None the less, there is no reason to suppose that the relationship between the two writers at this stage was anything other than warm and co-operative. The English writer even offered Lever (the older man by five years, and currently more successful) assistance, should he find it necessary to move his base to London. The offer was declined. Thackeray, at this fraught stage of his career, needed help more than he did, Lever privately observed. He was right in that. Lever continued his winning streak with military novel No. 3, *Jack Hinton the Guardsman* (January-December 1842) and *Tom Burke of 'Ours'* (February 1843-September 1844). In this last nar-

4. W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1848, repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983, with introduction by J. A. Sutherland), pp. xv-xvi.

rative the Napoleonic War grandiosity of *Charles O'Malley* reached its highest pitch. No less than six of Phiz's illustrations feature the Emperor – who takes a paternal interest in his fire-eating Irish dragoon and awards him the Legion of Honour for gallantry in his service.

Thackeray, meanwhile, was going very sour on things Irish. His wife, Isabella, had descended into incurable, suicidal madness on a trip to her family in Ireland in September 1840. Her family, particularly his Irish mother-in-law, were savage against the English husband – a sentiment he returned with interest over the following decades (see, for example, 'The Old Campaigner' in *The Newcomes* or Mrs Barnes in *Philip*). Thackeray was a founder member of the newly launched *Punch*, which, under the influence of the 'little Robespierre' Douglas Jerrold, was militantly pacifist. Lever's militant militarism was not to Bouverie Street's taste.⁵

In January 1844, Thackeray began the serial publication of *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, a biting satire on Irish military braggadocio. It was conceived during the publication of *Tom Burke of 'Ours'* which Thackeray reviewed, mockingly, along with the whole 'Lorrequerian cyclus', and its comical addiction to the 'blunderbuss and drum', in February 1844.⁶ Lever was bitterly hurt by this 'rascality'. Thackeray alludes, sarcastically, to Lever's novel in the title of chapter 5 ('Dobbin of Ours') of *Vanity Fair*. 'Darby the Blast' is, arguably, an influence on the conception of faithful Dobbin (an afterthought addition to the composition). It seems quite clear that – whatever else – he was reading the other novelist carefully.

Barry Lyndon went down badly in Ireland and, one guesses, with Lever. Nor can Lever have taken pleasure in a sketch of a visit to Waterloo that Thackeray published in January 1845:

Let an Englishman go to that field and he never forgets it. The sight is an event in his life; and though it has been seen by millions of peaceable *gents* – grocers from Bond Street, meek attorneys from Chancery Lane, and timid tailors from Piccadilly – I will wager that there is not one of them but feels a glow as he looks at the place, and remembers that he, too, is an Englishman. It is a wrong, egotistical, savage, unchristian feeling, and that's the truth of it. A man of peace has no right to be dazzled by that red-coated glory, and to intoxicate his vanity with those remembrances of carnage and triumph.⁷

Lever, currently making an excellent living from 'that red-coated glory', could not but see these reprimands as personal. More salt was rubbed in with a review (*Morning Chronicle*, 3 April 1845) of Lever's 1845 Christmas

5. For a description of Jerrold's radical pacifism at this period, see Michael Slater, *Douglas Jerrold: A Life* (London: Duckworth, 2003).

6. 'A Box full of Novels', *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1844, p. 154.

7. 'Little Travels and Roadside Sketches: by Michelangelo Titmarsh', *Fraser's Magazine*, January 1845, p. 96.

Book, *St Patrick's Eve* – a melancholy ‘social problem’ story set in Ireland’s starving 1830s. It was an odd choice of subject for the festive season – even in the starving forties. ‘If we want instruction’, Thackeray grandly declared, ‘we prefer to take it from fact rather than fiction’. Particularly Lever’s. Thackeray began serious composition of *Vanity Fair* a month later, in February.⁸ It would be ‘a novel without a hero’, but also – he had resolved – a Waterloo novel without Waterloo. An anti-Leveriad.

Circumstances delayed serialisation of the ‘Waterloo Novel’ until January 1847, and the Waterloo numbers, 9 and 10, until August and September of that year. As he prepared these pivotal instalments for press, Thackeray fired off for *Punch*, in that same August, a scathing satire, *Phil Fogarty: A Tale of the Fighting Onety-Oneth. By Harry Rollicker*. The burlesque hilariously mocks Lever’s trademark battlefield jollity (‘Ha! There goes poor Jack Delamere’s head off. The Ball chose a soft one, anyhow’)⁹ and the hob-nobbery with Napoleon, so prominent in *O'Malley* and *Tom Burke*. It is very funny. Unless, that is, you happened to be Charles Lever.

Thackeray, as satirist, wielded both pen and pencil – as one of the discarded titles for *Vanity Fair* records. His spoof illustration to the tremendous climax of *Phil Fogarty* transparently guys Phiz’s plate of the hero’s last charge at Waterloo:



8. For this being the likely starting date, see J.A. Sutherland, ‘A Date for the Early Composition of *Vanity Fair*’, *English Studies* (1972), pp. 47-52.

9. *Punch's Prize Novelists*, ed. Edgar F. Harden (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 46.

Another of Thackeray's discarded titles for *Vanity Fair* comes to mind: 'Novel without a Hero'. There was, clearly, too much of that in Lever's fiction for his increasingly astringent taste.

Battle lines were now drawn. Lever – himself an able satirist when he chose – introduced a scurrilous pen portrait of Thackeray as 'Elias Howle' in his November 1848 number of *Roland Cashel*. It was remorselessly *ad hominem*:

He was large and heavily built, but neither muscular nor athletic; his frame and all his gestures indicated weakness and uncertainty. His head was capacious, but not remarkable for what phrenologists call moral development, while the sinister expression of his eyes – half submissive, half satirical – suggested doubts of his sincerity. There was nothing honest about him but his mouth; this was large, full, thick lipped, and sensual.¹⁰

Thackeray was deeply hurt by the personality of this attack, and a formal complaint was made through Lever's publishers, Chapman and Hall (they also published Thackeray's Christmas Books at this period). Lever offered a somewhat disingenuous reply, via his publishers, claiming he had not intended to attack Thackeray personally, only a 'class of writers who have traded on Irish tour writing'. The author of *The Irish Sketch Book* need not, apparently, feel his withers wrung. Had he felt any grudge against Thackeray, Lever declared, he would rather pay them in a different manner (i.e. by fighting a duel). Thackeray was already, in November 1848, committed to giving his hero an Irish sweetheart and putative Irish in-laws, but Lever's attack must certainly have inspired an infusion of acid into his conception of Emily Fotheringay's drunken, duelling father, 'The Captain'.

It was a fierce literary brawl, and one that entertained literary London, and doubtless literary Dublin as well. But there was a clear winner. Lever would never write another military tale in the *Lorrequer – O'Malley* vein. Or another bestseller. Thackeray, already 'at the top of the tree with Dickens' (as he boasted to his mother) would go on from strength to strength.

There were, of course, other factors than Thackeray's virulence for the decline of Lever's reputation after the mid-1840s. He was unsettled at this period – virtually exiled from Ireland. It was hard to keep a finger-tip touch on the British reading public's pulse. Or the Irish pulse once he had left Templeogue. There was, at this period, a general change of tone in British fiction and a new seriousness. The Dickens of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and the Dickens of *Dombey and Son* have undergone a change much more

10. The passage, together with context that makes it quite clear that Lever was aiming at the author of *The Irish Sketch Book*, will be found in Chapter 22 of *Roland Cashel*.

dramatic than a period of three years normal development would suggest. The literary landscape had changed; and with it literature. One can find similar transitions in other novelists of the mid-1840s whose fiction took a darker, more radical turn – Harrison Ainsworth and Disraeli, for example.

Lever's attempt to march in step with this new seriousness in his monthly serial *The Knight of Gwynne* (in which Chapman and Hall attempted to promote him into the slot vacated by Dickens after his defection to Bradbury and Evans) was a failure. It was not Lever's strong suit. And, with the Irish famine in the background, a serial displaying images on its cover of Ireland 'GREAT GLORIOUS AND FREE' was horribly mistimed historically.

A number of reasons can be suggested for Lever's decline, loss of form, or bad literary luck in the mid 1840s. But as with Bulwer Lytton – a fellow victim of a Thackeray (and *Fraser's Magazine*) satirical campaign – the Thackeray (*Punch*) assault manifestly damaged Lever as a literary property. And, as he later told Edward Chapman, 'I lose all courage if I once feel that I am an unprofitable acquaintance to my publisher'.¹¹ After 1845, he frequently was unprofitable.

Thackeray may, as many contemporaries thought, have been a vindictive and ungrateful man. Lever had been kind and helpful to him. One would prefer to think he was working out his aesthetic over the years 1842 to 1847 – conceiving himself a latter day Fielding to Lever's Richardson. His satire was medicinal. His new sense of himself as a novelist, he famously informed Mark Lemon, the editor of *Punch*, was as socially important as 'the parson's own'. On his part, Lever too believed that his fictional project, with *The Knight of Gwynne* was tonic. As he told a friend, resorting to his favourite military metaphors:

I have suffered – I am suffering for the endeavour to supply a healthier more manly and more English sustenance but it may be that before I succeed – if success does come at all – the hand will be cold and the heart still – and that I may be only a pioneer to clear the way – for the breaching party. That such a taste must rot out of its own corruption is clear enough – but meanwhile Literature is an unattractive career for those who would use it with higher purpose.¹³

Whichever of the novelists was in the right, two distinct techniques for dealing with warfare had emerged from the quarrel. On the one side was the Maxwell-Lever-Phiz eyewitness technique which dealt with Waterloo full-on. Its motto could well have been Kurt Vonnegut's in *Slaughterhouse Five* – 'I was there' (or, at least, my good friend Maxwell and my illustra-

11. *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*, p. 165.

12. Downey, vol. I, p. 220.

13. *Vanity Fair*, p. 361.

tor's father were). 'I have the right to place my narrative in the middle of it all'. On the other side, there is the Thackerayan sidestep. Or, as he puts it in *Vanity Fair*:

We do not claim to rank among the military novelists. Our place is with the non-combatants. When the decks are cleared for action we go below and wait meekly. We should only be in the way of the manoeuvres that the gallant fellows are performing overhead. We shall go no farther with the –th than to the city gate ...¹⁴

As a matter of literary record, the reader indignantly retorts, Thackeray is an excellent military novelist. Turn, for example, to chapters 4-6 of *Barry Lyndon*, which he was writing virtually up to the month that he began *Vanity Fair*. The evasion from Waterloo in *Vanity Fair* was tactical. An artistic choice not to do a Lever.

Eight years after the publication of *Vanity Fair*, the young Tolstoy was in besieged Sevastopol, serving in the Crimean War. He was meditating his first works of fiction – war stories, of course. His diary for 8/9 June 1855 records: 'Laziness, laziness. Health bad. Reading *Vanity Fair* all day.'¹⁵ The same lazy week he read, for good measure, *Henry Esmond* and *Pendennis* (we should all be so idle). It was clearly the Waterloo Novel which most affected him. In the story he was writing up that Thackerayan week, 'Sevastopol in May' (1855), we find the following blatant echo of *Vanity Fair*'s last paragraph ('Ah *Vanitas Vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world?') and *The Book of Snobs*:

To Captain Obzhogov, Lieutenant-Captain Mikhaylov was an aristocrat, and to Lieutenant-Captain Mikhaylov, Adjutant Kalugin was an aristocrat, because he was an adjutant and intimate with another adjutant. To Adjutant Kalugin, Count Nordov was an aristocrat, because he was aide-de-camp to the Emperor.

Vanity! Vanity! Vanity! Everywhere, even on the brink of the grave and among men ready to die for a noble cause. Vanity! It seems to be the characteristic feature and special malady of our time. How is it that among our predecessors no mention was made of this passion, as of smallpox and cholera? How is it that in our time there are only three kinds of people: those who, considering vanity an inevitable fact and therefore justifiable, freely submit to it; those who regard it as a sad but unavoidable condition; and those who act unconsciously and slavishly under its influence? Why did the Homers and Shakespeares speak of love, glory, and suffering, while the literature of today is an endless story of snobbery and vanity?¹⁶

14. *Tolstoy's Short Fiction*, edited and with revised translations by Michael R. Katz (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), p. 310.

15. *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

16. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (1865-69, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude, ed. Henry Gifford, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 761-62.

It was not merely the Thackerayan rhetoric, but the Thackerayan tactic, the 'sidestep', which Tolstoy would absorb into his own narrative. The influence of Stendhal on the battle scenes in *War and Peace* has been commented on: that of *Vanity Fair* less so, I think. But Tolstoy's constant deflection, or retreat, from the battlefield to what is going with 'the girl I left behind me' (chapter 30, *Vanity Fair*) cannot but recall Thackeray and, by opposition, Lever. So too do the strategically brief, ironic and calculatedly un-Leverian irruptions of Napoleon, as in his encounter (in Book III, Part 2, Chapter 7) with the drunken Cossack, Lavrushka:

Finding himself in the company of Napoleon, whose identity he had easily and surely recognized, Lavrushka was not in the least abashed but merely did his utmost to gain his new master's favour.

He knew very well that this was Napoleon, but Napoleon's presence could no more intimidate him than Rostov's, or a sergeant major's with the rods, would have done, for he had nothing that either the sergeant-major or Napoleon could deprive him of.

No heroes in this novel; no Carlylean great men. It is distinctly Thackerayan.

Influence (a term I am conscious of using above) is a clumsy analytical tool. Very often what seems to be going on in nineteenth-century fiction is something more in the nature of a subdued conversation between practitioners. Progressing from *Charles O'Malley*, to *Vanity Fair*, to *War and Peace* the reader can, plausibly, pick up disagreeable exchanges between Lever and Thackeray and a more agreeable exchange between Thackeray and Tolstoy on the question of how to treat the big battle scenes at the centres of their narratives. There is other side talk (between the British novelists and Dickens, for example). But Lever, one would like to think, is there, a participant in the great fictional conversation. 2006 seems the right time to acknowledge his presence there.

ROBERT BARNARD

THE MARTINS OF CRO'MARTIN

In Henry Green's novel *Loving* – set in the home of a rich, upper-class Anglo-Irish family in the early years of the Second World War in Europe – there is a scene in which the chatelaine bitterly complains that she cannot get the right shade of pink blotting paper to match the writing paper in one of the guest bedrooms. When reminded of the war on elsewhere she dismisses it as a typically tradesman's excuse. It is a scene that encapsulates the futility of the Anglo-Irish.

Oddly enough, nearly a hundred years earlier, an almost identical verdict on that breed of man is embodied in Charles Lever's *The Martins of Cro'Martin*, done in greater detail but with still more relish. Go to any thesaurus and you will find a whole list of adjectives to describe both families: effete, useless, moribund, impotent. They have no place or use in the country, and they have no feeling for it or desire to contribute to it. They seem to resemble a family camped out in a hostile country for a long and dismal holiday, surrounded by people they despise yet fear. They have no desire to mix with anyone of the Catholic religion (this in the year after Catholic Emancipation, but old animosities die slowly or, in the case of Ireland not at all), and this renders still more pointless their attempts at being nice to the natives at the time of the general Election.

Cunningly, or perhaps as the result of a happy accident, Lever manages to take his characters to France, then gearing up for its second revolution, meant to get rid of the Bourbons for ever, but not quite managing it. The French aristocracy, back from exile for a brief fifteen years, is charming, but they too seem camped on hostile ground, essentially alien and doomed. The Revolution, when it comes, sends the Martins scurrying away from Paris to another country where they can be well-heeled aliens.

The reactions of the various Martins to their status as parasites and campers-out varies: Martin himself has nothing against the country or the people, and he can get sentimental about trees that he has planted, or servants he has known since boyhood. But he is emotionally as well as physically lazy, and the lassitude prevents him doing anything useful for the people whom he would not mind serving, except that service of the kind that could be of use demands an awful lot of effort, and Martin's main in-

lectual activity is finding ways to put off doing anything. His son Harry has for years cut himself off from Cro'Martin, which may seem the logical thing to do in a situation where the Martins do not love the native Galwegians and the Galwegians do not love the Martins. But young Harry is even more hopelessly without feelings or morals, or any emotion, except the need somehow to spend time and money. He is an addicted and heavily indebted gambler when we first meet him, willing to sign post obits at the blink of an eyelid if it will tide him over current difficulties. Old Martin at least has lazy warm feelings for his niece Mary; when it comes to the crunch, Harry is willing to use her as a pawn in haggling over his debts.

Most alien, most amoral, most granite-like in her prejudices is Lady Dorothea, born into the aristocracy and unable to forget that she has married beneath her. If Martin is too lazy to do good, Lady Dorothea is bent on doing harm, punishing, degrading, humiliating just for the hell of it. She is one of the most completely dislikable characters in our fiction, comparable to Blifil or Aunt Norris (but they are inventive compared to Dorothea). There is a tiny touch of humour that balances the blackness of her presentation when the Martins, after an election defeat, move away from Cro' Martin. Lady Dorothea finds that in any other location they are less than nothing; in England and then in France they are completely alone, completely unvisited and uninvited. To add to their humiliation, it is only through the intervention of their niece's governess that they eventually get acceptance by the French aristocracy, themselves no strangers to exile.

The exception to these comments on the Martins and their uselessness in a desperate time of social deprivation is Martin's niece, Mary. She is the central figure in the first half of the novel, and her warmth, her sympathy and her enterprise are a breath of fresh air amid the pervading stagnation, economic and emotional. Inevitably one compares her with more standard Victorian heroines, such as Esther Summerson and Agnes Wickfield, whose energy and sympathy seem exercised, by comparison, in a fearfully restricted area. One of the greatest barriers to her enterprise is the lack of people of a 'middling' kind; Lever notes of the doctor's family that they 'passed their lives in a little circle of home duties and affections', and this was because 'between the society of the Castle and that of the farmers around there was no intermediate territory'.¹

Lever faces up to the fact that Miss Mary's grandiose schemes of roads and harbours, schools, hospitals and clearances could in the end come to little; she is after all a teenage girl with little education and nothing but enthusiasm to guide her. He makes us aware that the bedrock of her projects

1. *The Martins of Cro'Martin*, vol. I, ch. XXIX, p. 398.

is a sense of *noblesse oblige*, a feeling, so lacking in her uncle, that riches brings with it duties and responsibilities. She can seem authoritarian, obstinate and wrong-headed, but one must remember the lack of any middle-class to temper her instinct to control, and the emotional emptiness of the Castle, which means she lavishes her warmth on those she helps, glorying in the reputation this brings her, the only respected member of her family.

One might be forgiven for thinking that Lever saw the salvation of Ireland in the young women. If Mary seems poised to balance the emotional scales of life in the country, Kate Henderson seems fitted to right the intellectual and political scales. The fact that she has a side which is cool, hypocritical and self-serving is only the consequence of her tradesman's upbringing in early childhood, followed by her favoured employment by a French noble family (contrasting, of course, with Lady Dorothea). She is omni-competent, can sympathise as well as stimulate. Whenever a cool, not to say cold, eye is needed she can supply it; thus she can sum up a proposal of marriage from Captain Harry Martin in the neat apothegm 'Each would have married beneath him.' (Incidentally Charlotte Bronte, on marriage, could have said the same thing). When the revolution comes she is resourceful and zealous, though she spouts the slogans of 1789 with an enthusiasm slightly ridiculous in the very different circumstances of 1830.

Yet it must be said that these two attractive and resourceful women do not represent the salvation of Ireland, any more than does the sympathetically presented Joe Nelligan, who begins as if he were Catholic Ireland's future hope, then fades away in the second half of the novel. Why is it that in the end, the novel is so lacking in hope for the future? Perhaps we might start with Keats's view of Ireland in 1818; the 'worse than nakedness, the rags, the dirt and misery of the poor common Irish', represented in Keats's account of his short stay by the 'squalid old woman' in 'the worst dog-kennel you ever saw' ... 'with a pipe in her mouth and looking out with a round-eyed skinny-lidded inanity.' Lever cannot, any more than Keats forty years earlier could, foresee anything better for Ireland than for her best children to seek a satisfactory life through emigration, as Kate and Massingbred (but theirs is hardly emigration from *need*) do at the end of the book. Yet this brings us to the least satisfactory element in the novel, that is its organization and plotting.

The main body of the novel depicts a contrasting pattern of energy and inaction, principle and moral vacuity. This carries itself forward for much of the novel, giving it a greater cohesion than any other of the Lever novels I have read. As the novel broadens into Europe and revolution, the Irish side receives the incursion of Mr Merl (spiritual cousin to Mr Merdle and Mr Melmotte). All sorts of criticism can be levelled at his depiction, but it

is as well to remember that Dickens in the first edition of *Oliver Twist* called Fagin time and again 'The Jew', and excused himself much later with the explanation that 'in the time to which the story refers, that class of criminal was invariably a Jew.' Lever could have made a similar broad generalization about the sort of man who lent upper-class young men money, but it certainly wouldn't have excused his sweeping and very silly generalizations about the whole race. But Merl serves his turn as a foreign excrescence who is aiming to replace an earlier excrescence not much less foreign, not much less malign, at Cro'Martin.

The trouble with the plot of the novel is that nothing in it really advances – moves, yes, but hardly more than that. People travel, die, become famous, but essentially they do not have the capacity for change; they lack self-knowledge, they lack understanding of their social and natural environment, they are incurably set in their ways. This seems to be a result of a basically pessimistic view of humanity from its author. Change, development, progress are barely conceivable to him.

The result of this is that the form in which he felt most at home is the picaresque form; it mirrored his own life and it mirrored his life view; there was change, but little development. But unfortunately fictional tastes developed during his lifetime; the picaresque style had a brief revival with *Pickwick*, novelists such as Mrs Trollope made a success of it (the Widow Barnaby books), but it soon fizzled out, partly because it was hardly suitable for the more thoughtful and unified novel of mid-Victorian times. Lever tended to move his novels forward by filling his chapters with one expedient after another; the chapter got written, ten pages were filled, and something, anything else could follow. Now this was not the practice with *The Martins*, but still the situation is essentially static; change will only come slowly, and hardly be visible as a result of any human endeavour.

Thus Lever was in something of a quandary how to finish this, and other, books. What expedient could make anything more satisfying than simply leaving things essentially unchanged? His first decision was to have a death-scene; one to rival Little Nell, Paul Dombey and Jo the crossing sweeper. But these three young people were essentially born to die; everyone could see it coming, death hovers over them throughout and their place in the novel's structure was secure. Mary Martin was not born to die, quite the reverse; her death adds nothing but a degree of pathos, and of course can lead to nothing but greater misery in the environment she had tried to change.

The second decision, made probably much earlier, was even more destructive to the cohesion of the book. Twins swapped at birth belong to the world of comic opera, but this novel has twins who are swapped

around when rather older, so that the younger becomes the estate heir and Mary's father Barry is then rightful owner of Cro'Martin (which he has no desire to live in, and hands over to the hopeless son of his younger brother, who inevitably gets it and himself into a hopeless financial mess and sells it). Was there ever a more ridiculous farrago? This last section (and for example the central plot of *Roland Cashel*) exemplifies just the sort of nonsensical notion on which a novel could once hang, but not in the 1850s.

One is driven to ask questions; was the death of Mary Martin necessary to the plot, does it add to the book? Were the switched twins necessary, or could Barry have inherited Cro'Martin by other means (Harry dying, or by purchase?). What is added by Kate and Massingbred (who is treated throughout with an ambiguity which suggests uncertainty rather than subtlety) going off to be rangers in the wilds of America?

To me, Lever is a writer who can excel in straightforward characterization, and in situation, but falls down when he has to connect them, conclude them to make his novel a satisfying whole. He is one of the great 'nearlies' of literature.

GEORGE BOYCE

LEVER, THE LANDLORDS, AND THE UNION

It was Charles Lever's misfortune to have been born – in Ireland – in 1806, and to have lived in Ireland, and (even while living abroad from 1845) to have remained absorbed in the affairs of his native land until his death in 1872. He would have been better advised to have chosen 1706 as the year of his birth, and 1772 as the year of his death; or even to have been born in 1772 and died in 1806. This is a rather whimsical introduction to a very serious predicament for an Irish protestant: for Lever's life-span witnessed an Ireland that was transformed from a protestant to a Catholic nation.

This must seem a large and even exaggerated claim. The downfall of Irish protestants as monopolisers of political, economic, and social privilege accelerated after 1870, with the transformation of the Home Government Association (which its founder the protestant lawyer Isaac Butt intended as a means of reserving a place for protestants in a subordinate Irish legislature) into a movement which protestants insisted was intended to exclude them from political power; by a succession of land acts passed by British Liberal and Conservative governments that undermined the landlords' economic domination; by the Gaelic revival of the 1890s, which sought to 'de-Anglicise' Irish society; and finally by the catastrophe of the Great War, which promised a revived and invigorated role for the Irish protestants, and especially the gentry, but generated the Irish revolution of 1916-23, and the foundation of a southern Irish state which excluded protestants from any significant political role in the new, democratic and Catholic nation.

Although Lever was fortunate not to experience this profound and irreversible transformation, yet he was farsighted enough to write a prelude to, and even in a sense to predict, its coming: especially in his warnings about the influence exercised in his own time by the political giant, Daniel O'Connell, the 'Liberator', who devoted his career to leading his Roman Catholic people into the promised land. O'Connell sought and enjoyed the support of some liberal-minded landlords. But his rallying cry of 'Ireland for the Irish' and his easy equation of 'Irish' with 'Catholic', provoked consternation in protestant ranks.

The Irish Conservative *Dublin University Magazine* warned in the 1830s that protestants were emigrating from Ireland in dangerously large numbers.¹ It was a sign of the times that on 1 November 1842 Daniel O'Connell became the first Roman Catholic Lord Mayor of Dublin since the seventeenth century. Lever was generally level-headed when writing about Irish Catholics, but his sense of fairness was severely tested when he wrote about O'Connell (whom Lever nicknamed 'Counsellor O'Bluster'):² the triumph of the 'Liberator's' demand for the repeal of the Act of Union that bound Britain and Ireland in 1801 would mean that 'high mass and high treason are the order of the day'.³ Lever knew that the restoration of the eighteenth century Irish parliament must hand power over to O'Connell and his people, and he was not reassured by O'Connell's claim that he preferred the rule of a Dublin parliament, even one dominated as it had been in the last century by Protestants, to the continuation of the Union.

Daniel O'Connell, himself from a landed family that had retained its property in Co. Kerry, made no direct attack on protestant landlords. But Lever believed that the survival of the protestant people in the Ireland of his day lay in stability of the landed system. Lever was a shrewd analyser of political and economic power. Landed property and social control were inseparable, not only in Ireland and Britain, but throughout Europe in the nineteenth century, and yet in Ireland it was under pressure from two directions. One was O'Connell's political belief in Utilitarianism, which argued that the foundation of politics was the pursuit of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. This is the basis of modern democratic politics and it must work to undermine the political and social power of any aristocracy anywhere. If the Union could be made to work to the advantage of the Irish Catholic majority, to place Ireland in its hands, then the Liberator was willing to give it a try. If not, the Union must be repealed.⁴ The second threat came from an unexpected quarter. British Governments, when they turned their attention to the great problem of Irish poverty and social unrest, concluded that the root of that problem was the landed system, and especially the landlord's neglect of his duties towards his tenants. These two, inseparable, issues dominated Charles Lever's political life. How was an Irish protestant to defend both his people and the Union with Britain, when the latter seemed on far too many occasions to threaten the well-being, indeed the survival, of the former?

1. *Dublin University Magazine*, Vol. 4 (July 1834), pp. 1-12.

2. Fitzpatrick, p. 286.

3. *Ibid*, p. 241.

4. D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth Century Ireland: The Search for Stability* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), p. 67.

Lever deployed his literary and editorial skills to advance his vision of an Ireland that could accommodate Catholic and Protestant. Inspired by its determination to be both Tory and Irish, and insisting that these were not opposites, but complemented each other, the highly influential *Dublin University Magazine*, under Lever's editorial direction between March 1842 and the Spring of 1845, warned landlords of the dire consequences of their neglect of their tenants' and therefore of their own interests. Landlordism must be maintained; but 'we do not think a Protestant confederation will produce permanent good if the constitution of the Irish tenantry be overlooked'. Repealers offered lower rents and fixity of tenure: 'what will the Protestant aristocracy offer?'⁵

This for Lever was a fundamental question. For, although not himself from a landed background, he acknowledged, as did southern Irish protestants generally, that the landlords were their political leaders – even though southern Irish protestantism embraced all ranks of society. As Professor J. C. Beckett pointed out, eighteenth century Irish protestant society was fluid: William Connolly, who married the sister of an earl and became Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, was reputedly the son of a blacksmith or a publican. Such advancement was of course confined to the protestant population in the eighteenth century, for a Protestant could rise to a position of influence from which a Roman Catholic, however well-born or wealthy, would be utterly excluded.⁶ But in the early decades of the nineteenth century the Catholic middle classes were flexing their political muscles and gaining electoral rewards from O'Connell's campaigns.

So if the protestant middling orders, of which Lever was a prime example, could rise to a position of influence, what was to be done about the Catholic, excluded from this experience by his religion? This question, which preoccupied Irish politics between 1782 and 1800, became more, not less, acute with the passing of the Irish Act of Union and its aftermath. The fundamental enigma of the Union – was it an instrument to preserve the Protestant in his ascendancy, or to ease the Catholic into a time of hope – was clarified, at least to his own satisfaction, by Daniel O'Connell: it must promote Catholic interests or it must go. Protestants surely exaggerated their loss of power between 1801 and the 1840s. They still enjoyed a firm purchase on key posts, in the police and magistracy, and even though the reform of municipal government in 1840 reduced protestant control, it did so mainly by abolition rather than reform; protestant Conservatives still maintained a stronger minority presence than had been an-

5. *Dublin University Magazine*, Vol. 22 (Sept. 1843), p. 377.

6. J. C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (London: Faber, 1976), p. 65.

anticipated.⁷ But it was nonetheless a minority presence, and it was the making of Irish protestants into a minority – no longer as in the eighteenth century able to claim that it was the Irish Nation – that seemed to many in the 1840s an almost inexorable process. Lever witnessed the rising tide of the Liberator's mass political movement. He sought to staunch the leaking away of the Protestant ascendancy; yet he did so without losing his faith in the possibility of a recognition of the common interest that he firmly believed existed between landlord and tenant. In the *Dublin University Magazine* he asked 'where, amid poverty and hardship, are such happiness and contentment to be met – natural and ever-ready courtesy, the kind of polite attention, the freely offered hospitality, as in the Irish peasant? Where is self more forgotten in all this wide and weary world? The answer fearlessly, in the cabin of the poor Irishman'.⁸

This is sentimental, though not therefore necessarily devoid of truth. But it was more important than this. For Lever this analysis of the Irish peasant offered a way forward. If the peasant was a kind of natural gentleman, could there not be uncovered and secured that affinity between landlord and tenant that united an aristocracy of birth with an aristocracy of nature? And in this way might not the influence of the former, and the well-being of the latter be reconciled, even enhanced? Let us explore this possibility through Lever's eyes, noting from the outset however that Lever was not merely seeking a stable rural order (though he certainly believed that was the best hope for Ireland), but knew also that such an order was one of power relations – and power, political power, is always a commodity of which there is never enough to go round. But before we go on, I think we must note one, perhaps fatal, flaw in Lever's project: that, as his biographer W. J. Fitzpatrick put it, Lever insisted that Catholic and Protestant did mix socially: 'opponents in controversy, but friends socially'.⁹ The question was, could social intercourse overcome or even survive political and economic diversity?

Lever was not naïve enough to believe that social ease by itself could overcome political and economic diversity. What he wanted to do was to persuade landlords that they must work to build upon the natural common experience of those who lived on the land. When in 1872 he looked back on his literary career, he noted that his work had been intended to illustrate 'what might be done by a generous and kindly treatment of the people, especially at the hands of those who thoroughly understood the

7. K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 25.

8. *Dublin University Magazine*, Vol. 14, p. 98 (quoted in Fitzpatrick, p. 81).

9. Fitzpatrick, p. 127.

complex web of their intricate natures'.¹⁰ This led him to cast a critical eye on the landlords; but he must be careful. Thus in his story, *St Patrick's Eve*, he denied that his criticism of the absentee landlord (landlords who lived away from their estates and handed over their management entirely to agents) was an attack on landlords in general; but rather a clarion call, an 'appeal to their good feeling, which they could only convert into an attack by convicting themselves. He did not want to 'lay on the lash when the back was already raw', but if he should live and act out his intention, 'I will recur to the topic, and certainly not spare the owners of property who prefer factitious political influence to a position of credit and honour, and self-indulgence to the high duties of their situation.'¹¹

It is significant that Lever sought to save the landlords from themselves, and thus save the nation from itself, from faction, conflict, social disintegration. His solution – the restoration of good faith and fair dealing between those who understood the Irish peasant and the object of their understanding – will seem to modern eyes unbearably patronising, and, like Maria Edgeworth's commentary on the land question, fundamentally a Conservative response to that question. But Lever was a Protestant and he could not envisage an Ireland without the leadership and best example that landlords could – indeed must – offer.

The recovery of the natural affinities between landlord and tenant was delineated in Lever's short novel *St. Patrick's Eve*, first published in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1845 and in book form that same year. Lever made a carefully nuanced criticism of Mr Leslie, a landlord who 'lived in ignorance that such people (the cottiers who lived most frugally on a mountain on his estate) existed on his property'. Yet though Leslie was ignorant of such people, yet they looked up to him 'with a degree of reverence almost devotional' as the 'head of a clan as it were' as the 'culminating point of the pyramid of which they formed the base'. Leslie was an absentee landlord; yet at the time in which the story was set (around 1825) Lever (looking back nearly fifty years later) observed that 'absenteeism had only begun to impair the warmth of this affection'. The bad landlord – and there were some – insisted on the precise payment of rents and on voiding leases whose exact conditions had not been fulfilled. Landlords mistakenly assumed that this meant that an estate was 'admirably regulated'. And so instead of informality, understanding, mutual support there was rigid, mechanical management.¹²

10. *The Martins of Cro'Martin*, vol. I, pp. xx-xxi.

11. Fitzpatrick, p. 236.

12. *St Patrick's Eve*, pp. 328-29, 381-82.

Landlords' ignorance of how their own property was run – indeed of its very composition – would be their downfall. Lever, as Charles Dickens did for Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, held that redemption was, at this time, still possible. On the one hand there was peasant gratitude, which Lever illustrated when the son of one of Leslie's tenants, Owen Connor, saved Leslie's own son from a beating at a fair, for which Leslie sought to reward Owen's father with a reduction in rent.¹³ Then there was the role that a resident landlord could play. He could hold up examples for his tenant to imitate, through rewarding the deserving, extending the benefits of education among the young, fostering habits of good order and good conduct among all. For landlords to fail in this 'great social compact by which the rich and poor are united' would be to resign 'the rightful influence of property into the hands of dangerous and designing men'.¹⁴ The overhanging debt of their tenants supplied landlords with a means of tyranny, but it also deprived the tenant of any desire to improve his condition. Thus the landlord complained of ingratitude, while the tenant spoke of oppression. When tenants lost confidence in the landlord, they began to believe that the only remedy was legislative enactment and thus became 'politicians for life'.¹⁵ Worse, they drifted into the hands of assassins and agitators. On the Leslie estate there was murder: but the police could not restore order, evidence could not be got, juries would not convict, law was defied, and private debts of wrongs and injuries were avenged. Notions of confiscated lands to be restored to their rightful possessors were revived, and the Catholic Church would be once more endowed with its 'long-lost wealth and power'. All were held together by 'a common tie of a church and a country'.¹⁶

Lever's reference to 'church and country' showed that he understood the power of the religious nationalism that was sweeping Ireland in his day. In explaining this, Lever was prepared to enter dangerous waters. In his novel *The O'Donoghue: A Tale of Ireland Fifty Years Ago* Lever described an encounter between young Mark O'Donoghue, son of a deposed Catholic landlord, and Sir Marmaduke Travers, the new, English owner. When Sir Marmaduke inquired about the ownership of a cottage on his estate, Mark O'Donoghue replied that it 'belongs to an Englishman – a certain Sir Marmaduke Travers – it is the estate of the O'Donoghue'. 'Was, you mean', replies Sir Marmaduke. 'I mean what I say', young Mark O'Donoghue insists, and then, seeing an eagle he shoots it. 'This fellow', he says, 'was a confiscator too, and see what he has come to. You'd tell me

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 326-31, 388-89.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 354-55.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 382-83.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 410-11.

that our lambs were his, would you?’¹⁷ Lever’s understanding of the danger of Catholic dispossession, however, did not persuade him that the protestant incoming landlord was doomed never to enjoy his tenants’ confidence and goodwill.

And when he looked back with the benefit of hindsight he still held that Ireland ‘could never have become what she is now’ had the landlords followed his advice: the ‘evil influence of bad men would not have been suffered to spread its contagion through the land.’¹⁸

The remedy lay within Ireland; but not with the restoration of the Irish Parliament. Lever admired the parliament on College Green, Dublin, or at least he admired the patriotism that it developed in the last quarter of the eighteenth century; the era of the so-called ‘Grattan’s parliament’. Lever wrote with feeling and affection for the great days of the Irish parliament, and lamented the fact that his father’s guests, many of them, were ruined by the Act of Union. In *The Martins of Cro’Martin* he lamented the fact that with the Union ‘the spirit died out’. The coming of the Union meant that ‘society in Dublin – using that word in its really comprehensive sense – ceased to exist. The great interests of the nation departed, men sank to the level of the small topics that engaged them, and gradually the smallest and narrowest views of mere local matters usurped the place of great events and liberal speculations.’¹⁹

This would seem to lead Lever into the paths of Irish Nationalism, for the most significant leaders of Irish nationalist opinion in the Nineteenth century – Daniel O’Connell, Charles Stewart Parnell – looked back to the era when Ireland had her own parliament. Lever’s *The Knight of Gwynne*, published in twenty monthly parts in 1846-47, and in book form in 1847, was described as ‘a tale of the time of the Union’, and its central character, the Knight, was a man of unshakeable integrity and deep wisdom. Its first illustration, by Phiz, would have graced any Irish nationalist publication of the Nineteenth century. The fair Hibernia stands, harp in hand, gesturing to an Ireland ‘Great, Glorious and Free’, nourished by the development of her resources and warmed by the happiness of her people.

We see men engaged in manual work, families reading intently, men and women dancing to the music of a harp. But – underneath – there lies a scene that could never have illustrated a work of nationalist propaganda: a riff-raff of never-do-wells flee from the fair Hibernia, factious fighters run away, one figure who looks suspiciously like a priest departs with an angry

17. *The O’Donoghue*, pp. 4-6.

18. *St Patrick’s Eve*, p. 431.

19. *The Martins of Cro’Martin*, vol. I, ch. xiv, p. 168.



glance over his shoulder, a figure in jester's clothes falls, dropping a placard on which is written 'agitate'; and on the right of the picture another character sprawls, letting fall his placard on which is written 'Repeal', Burnt cottages, a desolate farmhouse, a round tower, litter this part of the scene.²⁰

And yet the Knight, arguing the case against the Union, 'while never conceding, nor even extenuating the difficulties attendant upon a double legislature' (that is the co-existence of the British and Irish parliaments before 1801) proceeds to predict the probable train of events that must result from the abolition of the Irish parliament, 'strengthening his anticipations of facts derived from deep knowledge of the country'. 'We shall be in the

20. *The Knight of Gwynne*, Frontispiece.

minority, a great minority; but a minority branded with provincialism as our badge, and accused of prejudice and narrow-sightedness, from the very fact of our nationality'. This would be the position in England; in Ireland, every 'mendicant patriot that can minister to the passions of a people deserted by their natural protectors would surface.' Such men, if coerced, would be martyrs; conciliated, and they are privileged, but what would happen then, but a call for repeal of the Union, which would make of this 'miserable rabble' those 'dregs and sweepings of a party, a Parliament'. England would be asked to repeal the Union, to give a parliament to a country 'which you have drained of its wealth, from which you have seduced the aristocracy, to restore a deliberative body to a land whose resources for self-legislation you have studiously and industriously ruined'. Thus did the Knight address Lord Castlereagh, the great father of the Union, while acknowledging that both he and the Knight aspired to the same end, 'our country's good. If we take different roads, it is because each thinks his own path the shortest'.²¹

The following day, before the vital vote on the Union, the Knight forecasts what the 'Irish party' would do in the new Union parliament. The Knight warned that England would pay the penalty for ending the Irish parliament, not through the debasement and pollution of the peerage (which the British used to persuade the Irish parliament to wind itself up), for 'their (the new peers') origin would be forgiven before the first generation dies out', but in another misfortune. This would be that in the House of Commons politics would become a trade to live by, and the Irish party, with such an admirable market for grievances, would be a strong and compact body in the British parliament, too numerous to be bought by anything save grave concessions. Englishmen would never understand the truth of the condition of the country (Ireland) from these men, nor how little personal experience they possessed at home. They would be regarded as exponents of Irish opinion: they would 'browbeat, denounce, threaten, fawn, and flatter by turns; and Ireland, instead of being easier to govern, will be rendered ten times more difficult, by all the obscuring influences of falsehood and misrepresentation'.²²

In his last novel, the dark and powerful *Lord Kilgobbin*, published in the *Cornhill Magazine* between 1870 and 1872, and in book form in 1872, Lever confirmed his belief that Irish Nationalist MPs would act as parasites in the body politic. Even a member of the 'physical force' party, the Fenian Donogan, admitted that he saw the advantages of what he called

21. *Ibid.*, vol. I, ch. xviii, pp. 188-91, *passim*.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

'spies in the enemy's fortress', those member of the Whig Party who would 'aid us by their vote who would not risk a bone in our cause. Theirs is a sort of sub-acute patriotism; but it has its use. It smashes an Established Church, breaks down Protestant ascendancy, destroys the prestige of landed property ... and in this way it clears the ground for our operators, just as soldiers fell trees and level houses lest they interfere with the range of heavy artillery',²³

The most disastrous result of this infiltration, Lever alleged, was the ignorant interference by the British parliament and government in the relations between landlord and tenant. Lever was a severe critic of what he regarded as the evil effect of bad landlordism. But, being convinced that the remedy lay in Ireland itself, and particularly in the landlords' own hands, he was unsparing in his denunciation of British efforts made in his own time to find a legislative remedy for the defects in landlord-tenant relations.

Lever warned against the impact of land legislation made by the Westminster parliament. When in 1872 he looked back on his concept of the landlord-tenant relationship, its faults and remedies, he reiterated his conviction that the worst thing that could happen was British law-making to resolve the controversies. The 'great evils of Ireland' he noted in 1872, were 'social rather than political'. Legislation was not the answer, for legislation meant that parliament took upon itself the task of interfering 'to legalise the demands by which the tenant was to coerce his landlord'. Lever was 'strongly impressed with the conviction that the remedy lay less in legislative enactment than in the growth of habits of mutual charity and goodwill.'²⁴ In *Lord Kilgobbin* he returned to this earlier theme, warning against the dire consequences of Gladstone's land act of 1870, predicting (rightly) that it marked the beginning of a revolution, not an instant or violent one, but a revolutionary change in the whole landholding system in Ireland.²⁵

The question of what role British governments would play in the regulating of landlord-tenant relations in Ireland was one taken up by the distinguished Italian liberal politician and political thinker, Count Camillo Cavour. It is worth digressing briefly to consider Cavour's detailed commentary on Ireland, published in the *Bibliotheca Universelle de Geneve* in July 1844, since it helps explain why Lever's concerns about the role of the British Government in Ireland were well-founded. Cavour was deeply critical of what he called the 'English oppression of Ireland', but welcomed the Union and especially the reforming zeal of the British Whig Party in

23. *Lord Kilgobbin*, ch. xxvi, pp. 202-3.

24. *The Martins of Cro'Martin*, vol. I, pp. xv, xx-xxi.

25. *Lord Kilgobbin*, ch. xvi, p. 133.

the 1830s, and of the Conservatives in the 1840s. He believed that the repeal of the Union would be disastrous for Ireland and would lead to civil war. English politicians must continue with the regeneration of Ireland, a 'measured and prudent march', but a march nonetheless; and he hoped that these measures would make a 'fusion' of sentiments and interests of Ireland and Britain. His remedy – one that would in due course be adopted by Britain – fulfilled all Lever's worst fears, for it involved the British Government engaging in a radical restructuring of the land system in Ireland. The chief problem, Cavour insisted, was the defective agrarian system, the division between landlord and tenant, between the minority who possessed the land and the majority who cultivated it.' Remedying this was 'one of the most difficult problems that the legislator can undertake'. But Cavour did not doubt that a British Government 'enlightened, strong and impartial, can by degrees effect improvements'. He pointed to the tendency towards disorder in large areas of the country, with peasant secret societies organising and directing violence and murder against landlords, farmers, and the forces of law and order.²⁶ Cavour was convinced that the restoration of the Irish parliament was not the answer, that indeed it would result in the Catholic majority aspiring to power and dominance in its turn, animated by a 'spirit of reaction and of vengeance, which may be as fatal to Ireland in the future, as the spirit of oppression and intolerance has been in the past'.²⁷

Lever would have agreed with one half of Cavour's argument: that the restoration of the Irish parliament would lead to disaster. But he profoundly disliked the second, that the British should legislate in the interests of tenants as against landlords. Lever had the misfortune to live long enough to witness the beginnings of a profound shift in British attitudes towards the land question in Ireland, from the laissez faire philosophy of the first half of the century to an interventionist mood, one that abandoned the belief that free market forces alone could regulate landlord-tenant relations, to one that advocated defining through legislation the rights and duties of landlord and tenant, established by agrarian custom. But this was no spontaneous identification of interests such as Lever insisted upon; instead it was the duty of Government to move away from ideas of free market or the contract, and instead to alter society's value systems.²⁸ Thus

26. D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth Century Ireland*, pp. 104-5.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 329-30.

28. C. Dewey, 'Celtic Agrarian Legislation and the Celtic Revival: Historicist Influences of Gladstone's Irish and Scottish Land Acts, 1870-1886', in *Past and Present*, No. 64 (1974), pp. 30-70 (at pages 30-40).

the 1870 Land Act, which Lever detested, introduced compensation disturbance and for tenants' improvements, and these 'customary' rights were enshrined and defended in British law.

The Act conferred property rights on the tenant, rights as sacred as the rights enjoyed by the landlord; what was known as 'Ulster tenant right' was now legally recognised and customary tenant rights in other areas were to be upheld wherever landlords could be shown to have acquiesced in their enjoyment. When he introduced his Land Bill in the House of Commons, Gladstone argued that relations between landlord and tenant were undermined by 'laws written in the Statute Book, but never entering into the heart of the Irish people'. The old Irish notion that 'some interest in the soil adheres to the tenant, even though his contract has expired, is everywhere rooted in the popular mind'.²⁹

Yet, Gladstone claimed to be pursuing the same goal as Charles Lever: that of restoring to landlords a position, as Gladstone put it, 'marked by residence, by personal familiarity and by sympathy with the people among whom they live, by long traditional connection handed on from generation to generation and marked by a constant discharge of duty in every form that can be suggested – be it as to the administration of justice, be it as to the defence of the country, be it as to the supply of social, or spiritual, or moral, or educational wants – be it as to any purpose whatever that is recognised as protective or beneficial in a civilized society'. Gladstone wanted an 'aristocracy redeemed by service'.³⁰ So did Lever. But Lever warned against the British Government legislating to create such an aristocracy which must in the end serve to undermine it. In *Lord Kilgobbin* he anticipated that Downing Street intended 'taking away the landlord's right, and making the State determine what rent the tenant shall pay, and how long his tenure will be.' This was 'a sort of mild revolution', but what was parliamentary government 'but revolution, weakened if you like, like watered grog, but the spirit is there all the same'.³¹ Lever, even at this late hour, seems to have hoped that the earlier optimism of *St Patrick's Eve* was not yet dissipated: one of his protestant characters, the magistrate Mr Flood, complains that Whigs and Tories alike sought to conciliate the Catholic by outraging the Protestant; but surely differences could be settled 'better amongst ourselves?'. Why could not Protestant and Catholic pull together?³² The Lever of the 1840s would have asserted that they could; the

29. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

31. *Lord Kilgobbin*, ch. xvi, pp. 133-34.

32. *Ibid.*, ch. lv, p. 392.

Lever of 1872 was pessimistic: the Catholic Matthew Kearney replies that “We cannot get rid of the notion that we’d be outjockeyed” ... “We *know*”, cried the other, “that we should be outnumbered, and that is worse”.³³

Not every Protestant became a Unionist, but Lever faced the dilemma, indeed the crisis, that was to haunt his people, and especially the landlord section of his people, down to 1921. It was easier than it might appear for Lever to accept that the Union was their best hope of sustaining the status quo, that is, of securing them in their political, economic and social position. William Plunkett, an effective anti-Union debater, claimed that he would resist the Union until his death, and, like Hannibal, pleaded that his children be taken to the altar and sworn to hostility against the invaders of their country’s freedom; but in 1803 he took office as Solicitor General for Ireland, and Attorney General in 1805: and he was still very much alive.³⁴ But Irish protestant politics were not as simple as this, at least not with our subject. Lever described his politics as ‘good-humoured Conservative’³⁵, which suggests (misleadingly) that he was more of an entertainer than a serious political observer. He declared that he was as ‘sick of the ignorant stupidity of the High Tory as he is disgusted with the sordid conduct of the Repealer’.³⁶ But he feared what he foresaw as the destructive consequences of Repeal: that it would place the majority permanently above the protestant minority. In August 1843 the *Dublin University Magazine* advised ‘all who are interested in the stability of the British constitution to take care that the Protestant strength of Ireland be not overlooked or undervalued in a crisis which seems to direct all attention to the more numerous hosts of repeal’.³⁷

If Repeal of the Union would be disastrous, did that then leave Unionism as the only alternative? The simple and short answer is yes. But, again, Lever cannot be so readily compartmentalised; and the contradictions of his response to the Union help identify a strand of protestant political thinking that is often ignored or misunderstood. Lever’s national sentiment was not the Roman Catholic, middle class, modernising, strident politics of O’Connellism, but resembled in some respects at least the regretful, poignant, hopeful themes expressed in Thomas Moore’s ‘The Harp that once through Tara’s halls’. Moore was a Roman Catholic whose songs and music were as popular in England as in Ireland in the 1830s and

33. *Idem*.

34. J. C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition*, p. 84.

35. Fitzpatrick, p. 180.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

37. *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. 22 (August 1843), p. 252.

1840s. Many of them were imbued with national sentiment; but he hated the violence that sometimes shook the Irish rural landscape, inflicted by the Whiteboys and other secret societies, as did Lever, though Lever was ready to explain not only the crimes – but the causes of crimes – in *St Patrick's Eve*, when the young dispossessed and understandably embittered Owen falls in with, and nearly acts as executioner for, a dangerous gang; but in the end would neither kill those who caused his family's misfortune, nor – and here Lever showed a significant understanding of Irish rural loyalties and values – inform on those who planned to carry out such a deed. Lever demonstrated that an Irish protestant could feel a powerful sense of nationality, without being a nationalist: to adopt Dr Joseph Spence's subtle nomenclature, there developed in early nineteenth century Ireland a tradition of 'national Unionism'.³⁸

It can be argued that Lever displayed the inconsistency in the Irish Protestants' tendency to look back to the golden eighteenth century, while accepting the permanency of the Union with Britain. But he was, and remained, an Irishman, and he saw no inconsistency in his politics. He offered a strong defence of Ireland against English misconceptions and denigration. In his 1872 preface to one of his most popular novels, *Jack Hinton the Guardsman* (first published in 1843), he wrote that

Some disparaging remarks on Ireland and Irishmen in the London press, not very infrequent at the time, nor altogether obsolete even now, had provoked me at the moment; and the sudden thought occurred of a reprisal by showing the many instances in which an Englishmen would almost of necessity mistake and misjudge my countrymen, and that at these blunders and misapprehensions situations might arise that, if welded into a story, might be made to be amusing.³⁹

He praised the eighteenth century Protestant nation in all its brilliance,⁴⁰ but warned that it must now set itself to bridge the growing gap between landlord and tenant, between Protestant and Catholic. Lever stands in the tradition of the Nationally minded protestant Irish, a tradition which, paradoxically, could flourish within the Union, but which the Union itself, as Lever feared, might in the end fatally undermine. This tradition was vividly expressed by the Knight of Gwynne, who,

If he was English in his pride of government and his sense of national power and greatness, he was Irish in his tastes, his habits, and his affections. ... he was still more ardently attached to that land where, under the reflected grandeur of the monarchy,

38. J. Spence, 'Nationality and Irish Toryism: The Case of the *Dublin University Magazine*, 1833-52. (Paper read at the Fifth Conference of Irish Historians in Britain, Liverpool, 5 April 1986), p. 30.

39. *Jack Hinton the Guardsman*, p. iv.

40. *Ibid.*, ch. xxxvii, p. 365.

grew up the affections of a poorer people. ... 'and if he did not love England less, he loved Ireland more.'⁴¹

Lever's preface to the last edition of *The Martins of Cro'Martin*, written from Trieste in 1872, reveals a very different man from the optimistic young novelist of his early career. He wrote *The Martins* between 1854 and 1856, when, he now confessed,

There was not at this time the armed resistance to rents ... still less was there the thought that the Legislature would interfere to legalise the demands by which the tenant was able to coerce his landlord; and for a brief interval there did seem a possibility of uniting once again, by the ties of benefit and gratitude, the two classes whose real welfare depends on concord and harmony.⁴²

Lever insisted that he had not the shadow of a pretext to be thought didactic, 'but I did believe that if I recalled in fiction some of the traits which had once bound up the relations of rich and poor, and given to our social system many of the characteristics of the family, I should be reviving pleasant memories if not doing something more'.⁴³

By 1870 the Protestant Irish were becoming the Irish with a difference. It is indeed hard to resist the conclusion that Charles Lever, by 1872, had seen too much and lived too long.

41. *The Knight of Gwynne*, vol. II, ch. xlvi, pp. 136-37.

42. *The Martins of Cro'Martin*, p. xv.

43. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

TOM STARK

LEVER'S IRELAND: FICTION AS FACT

This essay examines some available evidence of the likely standard of living of people in Lever's Ireland of the 1830s. Consider the following three passages by Lever. The first is from *The O'Donoghue*, where English visitors are viewing Glenflesk in Connemara for the first time, and making a typical outsider's reaction to an Irish scene:

'Surely you cannot mean that people are living there?' said the girl, as a sickly palor spread itself across her cheeks.

'Yes, to be sure,' replied the youth; 'they have no better hereabouts.'

'What poverty – what dreadful misery is this!' said she, as the great tears gushed forth, and stole heavily down her face. (*The O'Donoghue*, p. 6).

The second and third are from *St Patrick's Eve*, and this story will be the one upon which I will concentrate. Here is Lever's description of Owen Connor's observation of English poverty, when he is constrained to travel from Ireland to the mainland:

It was a season of great distress in the manufacturing districts ... a great stagnation of trade existed, and a general depression was observable. ... The everlasting complaints of suffering and want rang in [Owen's] ears from morning till night; and yet to his unaccustomed eye the evidence betrayed few, if any, signs of the evils of great poverty ... What could such people mean by talking of distress, Owen could by no means comprehend. 'I wish we had a little of this kind of poverty in ould Ireland!' was the constant theme of his thoughts. 'Tis little they know what distress is. Faix, I wonder what they'd say if they saw Connemara?' (*St Patrick's Eve*, p. 393).

My third quotation describes Lever's perception of conditions brought about by internal dissensions in Irish society:

All the bonds of former love, all the relations of kindred and affection, were severed. ... Brothers, fathers, and sons were arrayed against each other. A despotism was thus set up, which even they who detested dare not oppose. The very defiance it hurled at a superior power awed and terrified themselves. Nor was this feeling lessened when they saw that these dreadful acts – acts so horrible as to make men shudder at the name of Ireland when heard in the farthest corners of Europe ... could be spoken of patriotically as the 'Wild Justice' of the people. (*ibid.*, p. 400).

These are not untypical quotes and Lever has, perhaps unwittingly, con-

tributed to a perception that Ireland was the ‘poor man of Europe – backward and lawless’. This perception persisted, at least in England, till recent times. It is also a view of nineteenth century Ireland put forward by Irish Republicans, some Irish historians, and economic historians as evidence of British ‘misrule’. Today, economic historians are still divided on the economic impact of the Union with Great Britain, though the weight of evidence is now beginning to lean away from the ‘misrule’ case.

St. Patrick's Eve is set in a rural community on the shores of Loch Corrib, a few miles north of Galway, on the edge of Connemara and not far from the location for John Ford's famous film *The Quiet Man* – by any standards a beautiful corner of the world. The book is in three sections which Lever calls Eras. The second Era we can date precisely as 1832 since it is set during a cholera epidemic from which 35,000 people in Ireland died.¹ This epidemic was part of a pandemic of Asian cholera which left Asia in the late 1820s, reached England in 1831 and Ireland and Scotland a year later.² The first Era is the year prior to this, and the last era is six and seven years later.

In 1831 the population of Ireland was 7.8m and it had risen to 8.2m by 1841.³ In 1801 there had been the Union Act of the two parliaments of Ireland and Great Britain – producing the United Kingdom – and by 1824 all trade duties and barriers between the countries had been abolished, the exchequers combined and in 1826 the currencies merged, such that by the 1830s Ireland was part of larger customs union not dissimilar to the later German Zollverein. Some economic historians have argued that Irish industries could not compete with British manufactured imports and, as a result, Ireland de-industrialized and economically declined. Irish wool and flax spinning definitely suffered, but there is little evidence according to a recent paper by Geary that other major industries declined.⁴ Geary also states that Ireland, in the 1841 Census, had a larger proportion of its population in industrial occupations than any other European country other

1. It is estimated that during the five years of the Great Famine (1845-1849) 55,000 persons died from cholera.

2. Details from Gordon Macpherson (ed.), *Black's Medical Dictionary* (London: Black, 2002, 40th edition, p. 116). In Scotland over half of those inflicted died: see Helen M. Dingwall, ‘Health, famine and disease’, in Michael Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (Oxford: O.U.P., 2001, p. 287).

3. The 1841 figures for Great Britain were 16.4 million. By 1851 The Great Famine, emigration, and demographic factors had reduced Ireland's population to 6.5m. Today the number of persons living on the island is 6m compared to 59m for Great Britain.

4. Frank Geary, ‘The Act of Union, British-Irish Trade, and pre-Famine de-industrialisation’, *Economic History Review*. XLVIII.1 (1995). This paper also demonstrates that there is no evidence from both census and trade returns that Ireland as a whole de-industrialised.

than Great Britain. Economists would predict that the creation of a customs union would bring in its wake a combination of trade creation and trade diversion, with an overall increase in trade between the participants culminating in general economic gain. Geary's paper demonstrates that in post-Union, pre-Famine Ireland there is evidence of limited trade expansion between the two countries and that this 'did not have the negative impact on Ireland's manufacturing that a number of writers suggest'.⁵

Nevertheless, some 53% of the employed population of Ireland did work in agriculture, and approximately two-thirds lived in 'rural' communities. They lived on land owned by approximately 5000 landlords and rented out to some half million tenants. The rest may have been landless but as sub-tenants were not 'homeless'. The early 1830s were generally years of recovery from the depression of the second half of the 1820s. The recovery reached a peak in the middle of the decade after which the economy returned to a period of distress. Nevertheless, the well-known Irish economic historian O'Grada writes that 'the period between 1832 and 1845 may well have produced fewer deaths from hunger than any 14 year period since 1741'⁶ and Clarkson and Crawford in a study of Irish diets state that 'diets in the 1830s were excellent ... when measured by the "recommended daily intake" of the nutritionist'.⁷

Economic data for Ireland, unfortunately, are scarce for the Nineteenth century, let alone the 1830s. One valuable source, however, is the *Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland* (hereafter the Poor Inquiry), which was published in 1836. This report contains much data on the expenditure and income of families during 1835. The object of the Report was to estimate the number of persons in Ireland who were in need of assistance. The Report in fact estimated a total of 2.4m or 30% of the population⁸ – not too dissimilar from today's proportion of persons receiving state benefits of one kind or another and re-enforcing Lever's simple but far-sighted conclusion, 'But poverty, after all is merely relative'.⁹ The facts and figures in the report were obtained by local dignitaries – landlords, ministers, priests, doctors etc., and not by the robust and thorough methods of modern statistical surveys. There was no handbook of definitions, guidelines on the collec-

5. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

6. Cormac O'Grada, *Ireland: before and after the Famine* (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 1995, 2nd edition), p. 5.

7. L.A. Clarkson and E. Margaret Crawford, 'Dietary directions: a topographical survey of Irish diet, 1836', in *Economy and Society in Scotland and Ireland 1500-1939*, ed. by Rosalind Mitchison and Peter Roebuck (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1988), p. 191.

8. O'Grada, p. 15.

9. Lever, *St Patrick's Eve*, p. 393

tion of data, let alone systematic sampling etc., and one suspects that much of what was recorded was what the dignitaries thought the ‘poor’ should earn, spend and eat, as opposed to what they actually did.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is the best we have, and my colleague Frank Geary and myself scoured this report thoroughly, and used it as a base for gathering in data from other sources to produce a number of family expenditure budgets for 1835.¹¹ A major conclusion we reached was that from an economic point of view there were two Irelands – a modern and a traditional. The former we call The East and Ulster, and the latter The West and Munster (see map). We have used a dietary index from Clarkson & Crawford (*op. cit.*) to define the geographical areas. The areas correspond loosely to a similar division by O’Grada, who, using later Great Famine relief data, drew a line from Sligo to Wexford. Lever lived in both areas: initially in Dublin, as boy and student, and as a doctor from 1832 to 1837 in Portstewart in Ulster – both in the modern area, and from 1830 to 1832, again as a doctor, in Kilrush in Connacht in the traditional area. The Loch Corrib community of the story is firmly in the traditional area.

We estimated that in the West and Munster, family expenditure ranged from £ 8 p. a. upwards, with a typical budget being £ 21/1/7d. In current Italian prices this corresponds to € 3445.¹² This level was only 80% of an equivalent estimate for The East and Ulster. Another notable feature is that in the West and Munster potato expenditure (including conacre/potato patch rents) accounted for 47% of total expenditure compared to 5 to 8% in the East and Ulster. In 1835 a family in the traditional area would have consumed 16.3 kg of potatoes daily. This is why the inhabitants of the West and Munster are sometimes referred to as the ‘potato people’.

This large dependence on the potato is hardly alluded to by Lever. In *St Patrick’s Eve* I only found two very small references to potato crop failure and the distress that this might bring¹³. Lever does not tell us the expendi-

10. Despite a volume on drinking, there were never any estimates presented on expenditure on alcohol.

11. Details of our research and methods are in Frank Geary and Tom Stark, ‘Trends in real wages during the industrial revolution: a view from across the Irish Sea’, *Economic History Review*, LVII:2 (2004), pp. 362-95. The object of the research was to provide weights for an Irish cost of living index for the Nineteenth century.

12. In British prices the corresponding figure is £ 2538 and in Irish prices € 4080. These estimates are outlined in the appendix, and allow for differing costs of living between countries and overtime. However these translations to present day prices must be treated with caution, as they cannot possibly make allowance for the largely unmeasured welfare loss, as we go back in time, resulting from the widely unavailable products of technical progress: for instance, in the 1830s products such as TVs, mobile phones and electricity in general, and many more which are now available to families on equivalent ‘translated’ incomes today.

13. *St Patrick’s Eve*, pp. 354 and 384.

ture of his hero Owen Connor or anyone else for that matter. We do know that he paid £ 10 p. a. for his mountain cabin (cottage) and 15/-s (£ 0.75) per acre for fields in the valley. The Poor Inquiry reports rents in the West of between £ 1/10/- (£ 1.5) to £ 2 for cabins plus £ 3 to £ 4 for conacre rent. It is clear that Owen Connor is relatively well-off, as Lever himself states that the Connors 'were many degrees of comfort beyond the majority of Irish cabins' (p. 334). Connor's rent payments were much closer to the Ulster levels of £ 12-13 p. a. as estimated by Geary and Stark in the 1830s. He is, of course, one of the half million 'direct' tenants. Owen Connor's sweetheart, Mary Joyce, was even richer, as she inherited £ 200 in cash from her father – a legacy of € 37,300 in 2006 Italian prices – a substantial amount. All this conforms to a well-documented conclusion in income and wealth studies that the distribution of wealth/income within a region is always much greater than that between regions.

The Poor Inquiry reports wage rates for agricultural labourers throughout Ireland, ranging (for male workers) from £ 7 to £ 14 p. a. or daily rates of 8 d. to 10 d. Actual annual wages would depend on the number of days worked – labouring was very much seasonal – and also on the class of labourer. The famous English economic statistician A. L. Bowley¹⁴ estimated that average agricultural wages in Ireland varied from £ 7 to £ 9 p. a. in the 1830s, whilst present day American/Irish economic historian Mokyr guesstimated at £ 10 p. a. (O'Grada, p. 15). These contrasted to Bowley's range of £ 30 to £ 32 p. a. for Great Britain. However these are money wages and do not allow for the differences in the cost of living between the two countries, which I have estimated to have been some 40% lower in Ireland in the 1830s.¹⁵ This would have meant that Irish real wages were just below half of those in Great Britain.

A feature of the first half of the nineteenth century was that money wages were relatively inflexible – 'sticky' to use economists' jargon. This was the case in both Ireland and Great Britain. It was prices that changed dramatically over time, bringing about fluctuations in real wages. There was no 'creeping' inflation as today, rather prices rose and fell in absolute terms in response to market conditions. The movement of prices in Ireland was generally similar in direction to those in Great Britain, but displayed greater amplitude such that the proportionate impact of these changes on real wages was much larger. Using real wage data compiled from Geary and

14. A.L. Bowley, 'Statistics of wages in the United Kingdom during the last hundred years, III: Agricultural wages – continued. Ireland', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, LXII (1899), pp. 395-404.

15. These estimates are derived from price indices for Ireland and GB in Geary and Stark (2004). See Appendix for details.

myself¹⁶ we show this for the 1830s in figure 1, and this is even after making an arbitrary adjustment by setting the base year (1835) value of the Irish index at half (i.e. 50) that of Great Britain. The time paths of the indices of real wages for the two regions were very similar. We see quite clearly the recovery/boom of the first part of the decade and the subsequent downturn. In figure 2 we put Ireland of the 1830s in a longer-term perspective. Here we present ‘possible’ separate real wage indices, after allowing for differences both in the level of wages and in the family budget expenditures, for each of our two regions of Ireland.¹⁷ We also put in a 5-year moving average for each series to give an indication of trend changes. The trend in real wages in Ireland was a rise from around 1815 to 1835, followed by fall until the early 1840s, then a sharp increase just prior to the potato blight that caused the Great Famine of 1845 to 1849. The Great Famine had a disastrous effect on real wages. Extremely large increases in potato prices caused demand driven price increases in other foodstuffs and real wages fell sharply. The fall was much greater in The West and Munster, as was the length of the subsequent recovery – possibly almost 15 years to regain 1845 levels compared to less than five years in The East and Ulster.¹⁸

Though most workers in Ireland experienced a trend rise in real wages after the Napoleonic Wars up to the middle of the 1830s, this was not so for textile workers. Textile workers were the second largest group after agricultural labourers, accounting for 20% of the workforce. There does not exist any wage series for textile wages as many spinners and weavers were self-employed and their real income was determined by the purchasing power of yarn and cloth they produced. Geary and Stark show that limited evidence suggests for textile workers there was no increase in real income after the Napoleonic Wars, and even employment opportunities diminished as technology replaced workers with machines – power-spinning most significantly. We also argue that it could have been only the plight of textile workers that largely enabled some economic historians to conclude that, despite an expanding economy after the Union, the poor classes became poorer in pre-Famine Ireland.¹⁹ There are no data on wage

16. Geary and Stark (2004). The wage data used are a combination of agricultural and building trade money wages, covering between over 70% of the workforce, deflated by a common Irish price index.

17. In this case we deflate the common money Irish wage data by 0.8 for The West & Munster to reflect a likely lower level, and then deflate each money wage index by separate price indices for the regions which are compiled using the same price data but different weights, reflecting the differing family expenditure patterns of each region.

18. Our real wage series is based on 1835 expenditure weights, and these must have changed to counteract the relative increase in potato prices such that we are possibly overstating the length of the post depressionary impact of the potato crisis.

19. See Joel Mokyr and Cormac O’Grada, ‘Poor and getting poorer? Living standards in Ireland

or income distribution for nineteenth century Ireland, yet inequality does affect living standards as do a whole range of other factors, such as household size and number of dependents, age, hours and conditions of work. These must remain research tasks for the future.²⁰

The conventional measure of living standards both over time and between countries is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, broadly speaking the per capita value of all a country's annual output of goods and services. If we are comparing over time, then this GDP value must be adjusted for changes in prices (constant price estimates), and if between countries measurements must be in a common currency or unit adjusted for the differing absolute and relative price levels in each country (purchasing power parity conversions). If we are comparing both over time and across countries then all adjustments are necessary, which is a complicated and massive task. Geary and myself,²¹ using our own estimates along with data from Maddison,²² estimated for 1871 that real GDP per capita in Ireland was 59% of that in Great Britain. This contrasted to an Italy/GB ratio of 41%²³ and 53% for France. Further estimates from Maddison gave ratios of 49% for Sweden and 40% for Spain. If Ireland was the 'poor man of Europe' in the 1830s, there had been a remarkable recovery since then especially bearing in mind the disastrous calamity of the Great Famine. In table 1 I have made Geary/Stark estimates back to 1861 and then made via some tentative "guesstimates" and using various sources GDP per capita ratios to GB for some countries back to 1821. The results indicate that Ireland may have been poorer than our selected countries in the 1820s, but – apart from the 'Famine' effect in 1851 – was catching up fast and was the only one catching up Great Britain. Moreover, Ireland's initial ratio deficits to these other countries were far less than theirs at any time to Great Britain. The problem was not that Ireland was poor by European standards, but rather her nearest neighbour was very rich. Whether an Ireland with her own parliament would have done better we will never know. If this parliament had been able to ward off the bad aspects of absentee landlords, and pursued famine relief policies, then some of the horrors of the Great Famine may have been avoided. On the other

before the Famine', *Economic History Review*, XLI (1988), pp. 209-35.

20. Economic research in Ireland has been very much hampered by the destruction of many documents when the Public Records Office in Dublin was shelled during the 1922 Irish Civil War.

21. Frank Geary and Tom Stark, 'Examining Ireland's post-Famine economic growth performance', *Economic Journal*, 112 (2002), pp. 919-35.

22. Angus Maddison, *Monitoring the World Economy 1820-1992*, Paris: OECD, 2000.

23. The ratio would be 51% if we use Fenoltea's newly published figures for Italy. See Stefano Fenoltea, 'The growth of the Italian economy, 1861-1913: Preliminary second-generation estimates', *European Review of Economic History*, 9:3 (December 2005).

hand, if protectionist policies had prevailed then economic history tells us that the track record of such policies is not impressive, as was the case with the Republic of Ireland after 1926, until such policies were abandoned in the 1960s.

Finally, I wish to move away from facts and figures. There was one passage at the beginning of the Second Era in *St Patrick's Eve* that intrigued me. This passage came after landlord Leslie had visited the Connors in their mountain cabin to reward them with free rent – a reward brought on by Owen Connor's protection of young Mr Leslie during a brawl down in the valley on St Patrick's Eve. The free rent was duly accepted, but a further offer to move into a farm with more fertile land in the valley was not. It transpired later in the Second Era that Leslie wanted the mountain for grouse shooting. If this had been the Highlands of Scotland, the Connors would have simply been 'cleared'. If Lever had told us that Owen had rejected the move because he had valued this property and concluded it was not in his interest to move, then an economist would have understood. Market value miscalculations are not uncommon, but rarely last for ever. However, Lever wrote, 'In preferring this mountain tract to some rich lowland farm, they were rather guided by that spirit of attachment to home of their fathers – so characteristic a trait in the Irish peasant – than by the promptings of self-interest'.²⁴

Lever is not only admitting that Owen overvalued his property, but did so not pursuing his own interest but that of dead ancestors. If Adam Smith could have read Lever he would have held his hands up in horror at such a characteristic trait and, probably, would have pronounced no hope for the Irish peasant. Consider from Adam Smith's writings this most famous of all economic statements:

the annual revenue of every society is always precisely equal to the exchangeable value of the whole produce of its industry ... as every individual endeavours ... to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. ... he intends only his own gain, and in this as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of society more effectually than when he intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good.²⁵

Smith's public good in Lever's novel correlates with 'the good of the ancestors'. Certainly, by rejecting the move, Owen Connor has made all cur-

24. *St Patrick's Eve*, p. 341.

25. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1901), pp. 26-7.

rently living in this society worse off than they may have been. The Connors themselves by definition are so deprived as are the landlord and his shooting friends and, possibly, those who may have benefited from increased agricultural output from the presumably idle farm land and of course the resulting knock-on effects. The 'dead ancestors' have held back growth and greater prosperity for their successors and thereby future 'ancestors', such is the logic of irrational behaviour.

Fortunately for Ireland, Adam Smith has proved to be a better judge of Irish traits than Lever. Modern Ireland (at least the Republic) is a raging cauldron of people (including peasants) pursuing self-interest, and this may explain why the Republic of Ireland (RoI) currently lies seventh in the CIA's world fact file rankings of GDP per capita for the whole world.²⁶ This compares to 25th for the United Kingdom and 28th for Italy. GDP per capita in the RoI – which comprises our 1830s West and Munster region plus South Leinster – exceeds that of the UK by 14% and Northern Ireland – formerly part of our East and Ulster – by 24%. Roles have been changed – Ulster is now a sluggish, dependent economy whereas the rest of Ireland is dynamic and enterprising, the latter stemming from a decision by the RoI to join the Common Market with the UK in 1972 – an even bigger customs union than that of the 1830s. Frank Geary was prompted to conclude verbally to me that it only goes to show that 'Ireland really is Unionist'. Charles Lever would be relieved.

26. www.cia.gov/publications/factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html.

Table 1
GDP per capita as ratio to that of Great Britain
(allowing for differences in the price level between countries)

GB =100

Year	Ireland	Italy ¹⁰	France	Spain	Sweden
1821	48 ¹ – 54 ²	62 ³	69 ³	60 ³	68 ³
1831	49 ¹				
1841	49 ¹ – 62 ⁴				
1851	45 ⁵		71 ³	49 ³	55 ³
1861	58 ⁶	51 – 61 ⁷			
1871	59 ⁸	41 – 49 ⁷	53 ⁸	40 ⁹	47 ⁸

Sources:

Deane and Cole

Fenoaltea

Geary and Stark (2002)

Maddison

Mitchell

Notes:

1. Assuming Irish GDP is 15% of GB's
2. Maddison's estimate of Irish GDP
3. Maddison's estimates and using UK for GB.
4. Mokyr's GDP estimate for Ireland
5. Deane and Cole's 14.5% of GB GDP for Ireland
6. From table 7 in Geary and Stark
7. Fenoaltea's estimate for Italy
8. Table 6 from Geary and Stark
9. 1870 data.
10. Italian figures are for 1820 and 1850. Maddison does not state what he means by Italy in 1820.



The Economic Division of Ireland in the 1830's

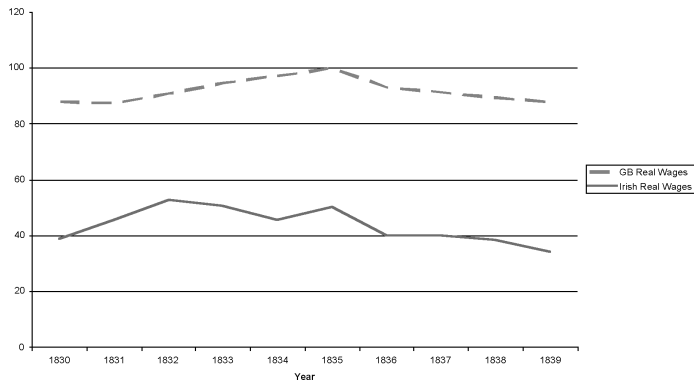


Fig. 1 - Irish and British Real wages in the 1830's.

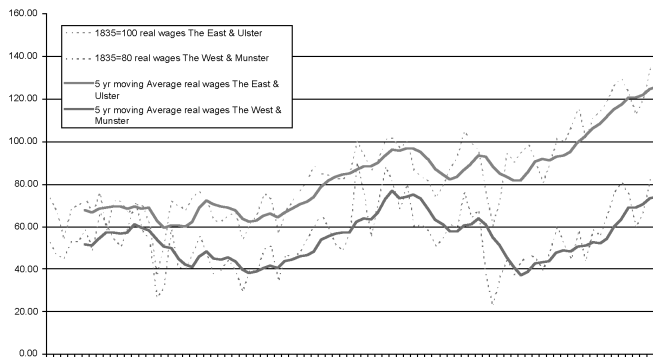


Fig. 2 - Irish Real wages 1780-1870.

Appendix

TRANSLATION OF 1830S IRISH VALUES TO PRESENT DAY VALUES

Step 1: The *Economic Trends* (a monthly official UK publication) of March 2004 published a price index for the UK for 1750 to March 2003.²⁷ This was brought up to March 2006 with data from the Office of National Statistics website. From this we obtained a ratio of March 2006 prices to 1835 prices. The ratio was 84.5 and we assumed applied mainly to Great Britain.

Step 2: Geary and Stark²⁸ estimated that in 1861 Irish prices on average were 12% lower than those of Great Britain. Setting the 1861 Irish price index from Geary and Stark at 12% below the GB price index we traced the ratios of the two indices for each year back to 1820. We used 5-year moving averages to smooth out the effect of any 'rogue' years. The ratio from step 1 was then multiplied by that of GB to Irish prices. In 1835 this was 1.43 and the 2006 to 1835 ratio for conversion to current British prices was 120.8 (1.43 x 84.5). This produced a value of £ 2538 in 2006 corresponding to £ 21/1/7d in 1835 West and Munster (£ 3138 for The East and Ulster).

Step 3: The calculations from step 2 were converted to the Euro at an exchange rate of 1.46 (€/£). Thus we have for 1835 € 3713 in British prices. Using the OECD estimates on comparative price levels in 2005 this translated to approximately € 3445 in Italian prices and € 4080 in Irish prices. In 2005 OECD states Irish prices, on average, were 10% higher than those in the UK and Italian prices were 7% lower than British.

Finally, it must be stressed that these calculations are far from robust and are only intended to give a rough idea of living standards in 1835 in today's values.

27. Jim O'Donoghue, Louise Goulding and Grahame Allen, 'Consumer price inflation since 1750', *Economic Trends*, 604 (March 2004).

28. See footnote 39 in Geary and Stark, 2004.

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VALERIE LESTER

LEVER PHIZZES

Hablot Knight Browne, better known by his pseudonym, Phiz, is recognized as the principal illustrator of the works of Charles Dickens, with whom he collaborated for 23 years and provided illustrations for 10 major novels. What the reading public is completely unaware of is that he was also Charles Lever's principal illustrator, with whom he collaborated for 26 years and provided illustrations for 16 major novels. In addition, he provided illustrations for minor works by both authors. Like Lever, Phiz, the man, is virtually unknown. Both men were obscured by the huge, greedy shadow of Charles Dickens.

The purpose of the Lever conference in Pisa was to bring Lever to light after almost a century of obscurity, and a novel by Lever necessarily brings Phiz into the mind's eye. The aim of this article, therefore, is to illuminate their mutually beneficial collaboration.

Hablot Knight Browne was nine years younger than Lever. Born in Kennington on July 12, 1815, he was the fourteenth of fifteen children in the household of William Loder Browne and Catherine Hunter Browne. His natural parents, however, were the Brownes' oldest daughter, Kate, and Captain Nicholas Hablot, a horse grenadier in the Old Guard of Napoleon's Imperial Guard. Kate met Captain Hablot when he was a prisoner on parole in England before he was returned to France (probably some time in 1812). The Browne family subsequently resided in St. Omer in the short-lived period of peace (1814-1815) while Napoleon was in Elba, and it appears that Kate became pregnant with Phiz by Captain Hablot during that time. On Napoleon's return to France, the Browne family fled back to England, and Phiz was born in London one month after the Battle of Waterloo. The family assumed that Captain Hablot had lost his life on the field of battle, and absorbed Phiz into their midst. Kate's role in his birth was kept a secret, and he was always referred to as the son of William and Catherine Browne. The baby was given the name Hablot in memory of the gallant captain (who, as it happened, survived the Battle of Waterloo, although seriously injured, retired to eastern France and married a young Frenchwoman a year later).

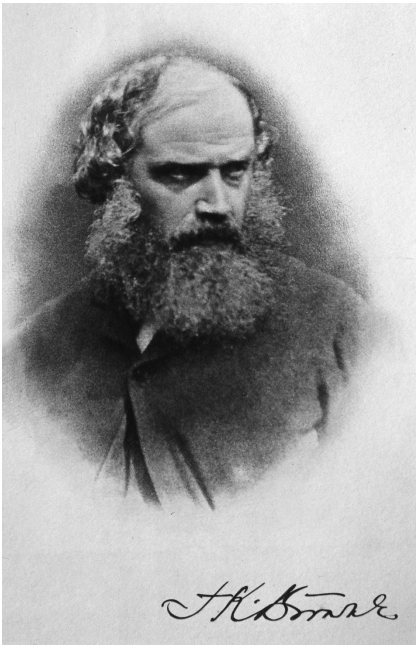
Phiz inherited his artistic talent from Kate Browne. The Brownes were

descended from Huguenot watchmakers who changed their name from Bruneau to Browne when they emigrated to England and settled in Spitalfields. They were silk weavers and calligraphers – and from them Phiz inherited a talent for working on a very small scale. He trained at Finden's, the leading engravers of the day, but hated the drudgery of engraving other peoples' images. He far preferred etching his own designs, and also had a firm notion that he would one day become a fine artist. Etching was always his preferred medium for illustration although he was sometimes required to design wood engravings, which could be dropped into the text rather than printed on a separate page, as was the case with etchings. Occasionally, he produced both etchings and wood engravings for the same book. His lucky break in the illustration business came when he was suddenly hired to pick up the reins on Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, following the suicide of Robert Seymour and Dickens's subsequent firing of Robert Buss.

Phiz lived in London most of his life, apart from a ten-year hiatus in the wilds of Surrey in his middle years and two years in Brighton at the end of his life. He married sixteen-year-old Susannah Reynolds when he was twenty-five, and they produced a total of twelve children, nine of whom survived into adulthood, and all of whom were artistically talented. Like Lever, he adored his family; like Lever, he loved nothing more than riding

a horse across country; like Lever, he was a terrible businessman. Feast or famine ruled his life, and he never thought of saving for a rainy day. After nearly a quarter of a century of popularity as an illustrator, he fell from favour at the time of the advent of the Pre-Raphaelite movement with its insistence on realism. He drifted into poverty towards the end of his life, but friends, hearing of his predicament, persuaded the Royal Academy to award him an annuity. He was able to live his last few years, as he had predicted, 'tolerably comfortable.' Phiz died at Brighton on July 10, 1882, having provided illustrations for over 200 books and countless magazines.

Unfortunately, no photos or paintings of Phiz as a young man exist,



Phiz (H.K. Browne).

but this photograph gives some idea of his looks. It is a pity that so much facial hair obscures his features. His eyes were hazel and said to be piercing; his hair was brown, and his complexion olive, in contrast with his blue-eyed, fair-skinned siblings.

At first, Charles Lever wanted the fashionable George Cruikshank, who had just illustrated *Oliver Twist*, to illustrate *Harry Lorrequer*. In December 1838, Lever wrote from Brussels to Alexander Spencer: 'I am very desirous that the illustrations should be by Cruikshank, not Phiz. Pray try to accomplish this for me ... I wish above all that he [M'Glashan] could put me in relations with the illustrator for the scenes to be selected as subjects.'¹ Because of his popularity, Cruikshank was overworked and unable to accept Lever's invitation at that moment, but he did eventually illustrate one of Lever's works, *Arthur O'Leary* (1844). In the event, Phiz was hired to illustrate *Harry Lorrequer*, probably at the publisher's insistence, since he was much in the public eye as a result of the huge success of *Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. Also in Phiz's favour were his willingness, reliability, and technical competence. Lever was not entirely happy with Phiz at first, complaining from Brussels to M'Glashan in January 1839:

H.K. Brown [sic] has not yet written to me, and I regret it the more because if I knew the scenes he selected, I might have benefited by his ideas and rendered them more graphic, as an author corrects his play by seeing a dress rehearsal. Has Phiz any notion of Irish physiognomy? for this is most important. If not, and as 'Lorrequer' abounds in specimens, pray entreat him to study the Tail² when they meet in February: he can have nothing better, if not too coarse for his purpose. (Downey, pp. 109-10).

However, by April 1839, Lever was able to write to Alexander Spencer: 'Tell me what you think of the illustrations. I am much pleased with them.' With Lever in Brussels and Phiz in London, it was difficult for the two men to communicate, and eventually Lever invited Phiz to visit him in Belgium, along with Samuel Lover, the Irish painter and writer. The visit was a huge success, turning into a mixture of hard work and excessive partying. Lover wrote home saying that they did nothing all day and night but eat and drink and laugh themselves sick. Lever in turn told his publisher, 'If I have a glass of champagne left – we finished nine dozen in sixteen days Lover and 'Phiz' spent here – I'll drink your health.' (*Ibid.*, p. 151). The high point of the visit came when, not content with merely knocking back champagne, the three men decided to install themselves as Grand Crosses of the Order of the Knights of Alcantara in an elaborate ceremony which

1. Downey, vol. I, p. 107.

2. Downey explains: 'This was an epithet applied to the 'Repealers' who followed O'Connell's leadership.'



Harry Lorrequer (1839/40), *The Supper at Father Malachi's* (p. 78).

concluded with a musical procession and a grand ballet. Lever was working on his third novel, *Jack Hinton*, at the time, and he and Phiz were able to spark ideas off each other. At one point in *Jack Hinton*, the hero was, like Captain Hablot, a prisoner on parole, and his parole town was St. Omer, the very town where the Browne family had lived in 1814-1815. It begins to sound as though Phiz recounted the story of Captain Hablot to Lever, who immediately referred to it in his burgeoning novel.

The visit to Brussels cemented both the working relationship and the lifelong friendship between Phiz and Lever, who wrote to Spencer about their collaboration: 'Browne has been with us for the last few weeks making arrangements about the illustrations, and I think this part,

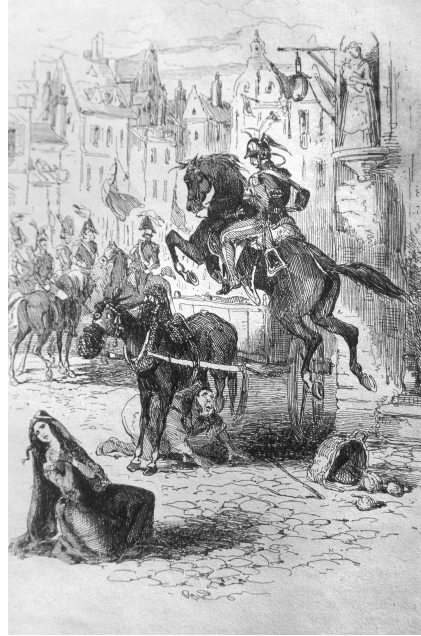
at least, will be better than heretofore.' Phiz subsequently visited him at Templeogue; they saw each other in London; Lever invited him for a visit to Reider Schloss; and, according to a handwritten Browne family history,³ Phiz made a trip to Italy, presumably to see Charles Lever rather than to study the great Italian painters, for whom he had no appetite. To read an article about an illustrator without seeing his work is an essay in frustration, so I have chosen several images that demonstrate Phiz's range, development, techniques, and the symbiotic relationship between the writer and artist.

This is an excellent example of Phiz's early, boisterous work, full of grotesquerie and a complete disregard for proportion. It is clear that he has been infected with Lever's ebullience. The slim leading gent steps out of the image, looking disturbingly like Nicholas Nickleby, while a grossly macrocephalic Father Malachi appears at his feet. Malachi has overturned the table and the scene is alive with flying objects and crockery smashing to the ground. It is hard to imagine a more vigorous etching, nor one so

3. C.G. Browne & A.S. Bicknell. *Notes to Assist the Future Authors of the History of the Huguenot Family Browne* (1903).

immature while at the same time technically proficient. Not surprisingly, Lever complained: 'Why is Lorrequer ... made so like Nicholas Nickleby? That is unfortunate, and every one sees it at a glance. All plagiarisms in the book, I beg to say, are my prerogatives.' (*Ibid.*, p. 111).

This feat of horsemanship apparently comes from an incident in Lever's own life when, as a young doctor in Portstewart, he was galloping full tilt to the bedside of a patient only to find a turf cart across his path. Unable to rein in his horse quickly enough, he jumped it over the cart and continued on his way – and then proceeded to transfer the incident to Lisbon, planting the cart across Charles O'Malley's path. This subject was perfect for Phiz whose favourite subject was horses. It is al-



Charles O'malley (1841), *Charles O'Malley Topping a Mule Cart* (vol. 1, p. 320).

ways useful to pay attention to the expressions in Phiz's horses' eyes because they often comment on the action in the scene. In this image, Phiz has clearly gained more control over proportion than he had in the illustrations for *Harry Lorrequer*, even though the figure huddling under the mule is markedly reminiscent of Father Malachi under the table. Phiz could often be self-referential. All the same, this picture represents the beginning of greater maturity as an illustrator, even as Lever himself was gaining more control over his writing.

It is hard to underestimate how hugely the memory of Napoleon still loomed in the 1830s, and it is inevitable that he would make an appearance in Lever's military novels. He first shows up in a single image in *Charles O'Malley*, in a game of leapfrog, but in *Tom Burke* he is a star turn, appearing in no less than six illustrations. Phiz was not known for his portraiture, but his Napoleon is easily identified by his height, his hat, his white trousers, or his white horse. In 'Tom distinguishes himself' Napoleon is immediately recognizable as he and others gaze down on a swooning, androgynous Tom. The two young women are typical of Phiz's charmers, while the young man on the left displays another of Phiz's strengths, his ability to draw great legs. What is very odd, however, is the



Tom Burke (1844), Tom distinguishes himself (p. 228).



Tom Burke. Detail from Peeping Tom (p. 171).

placement of the two men at the top of the image. Are they on horseback? Phiz may have stuck them there, in order to make an apex, for the sake of composition, but in so doing he jeopardizes proportion.

Here Lever writes:

I peeped over the 'drop,' and beheld the figure of a young, plump, and pretty girl busily engaged in lacing her stays ... [Her] buxom figure, not the less attractive for the shortness of her drapery, showed itself to peculiar advantage as she bent to one side and the other in her efforts to fasten the impracticable bodice. A mass of rich brown hair, on which the sun was playing, fell over her neck and on her shoulders, and half concealed her round, well-turned arms as they plied their busy task. (*Tom Burke of 'Ours'*, vol. I, p. 171).

Lever and Phiz must have thoroughly enjoyed writing and illustrating this image. Phiz loved women and delighted in portraying a fair neck, a high bosom, and thighs swelling under drapery. He particularly enjoyed the rare opportunity to work on an erotically charged image like this one. This detail offers the opportunity to see how Phiz created his shading by the use of cross hatching and also to catch sight of a habit he was never able to break: anthropomorphism. Here the mirror has a face; in many of his other images, rocks, trees, houses, hats, anything that takes his fancy may sport a face.

This is Phiz's account of Lever's 'huge fellow, without legs, [who] rode upon an ass, his wide chest ornamented by a picture of himself, and a paragraph setting forth his infirmities. He, with a voice deeper than a bassoon, bellowed forth his prayer for alms.' (*St. Patrick's Eve*, p. 318). *St. Patrick's Eve* is one of the books for which Phiz provided both etchings and wood engravings, and this image is one of Phiz's finest wood engravings. (All of the other images in this article are etchings on steel). It is one in which the author's intent and the illustrator's skill is closely fused, and it fairly bursts with noise as the beggar yells and the people in the background chit-chat. The little donkey is both alert, and patient, and on the right, at the bottom of the picture, a huge cauldron and a cooking pot lie on their sides, empty. Phiz often employs



St. Patrick's eve (1845), *The Beggar* (p. 9).



Knight of Gwynne. 'Mercy on us! The Leddies are Coming!' (vol. 2, p. 131).

such objects as emblems of want.

In this hilarious, complex image, Phiz manages to illustrate the present and the past at one and the same time. In the text, Daly has been reminiscing to Sandy about their adventures in Canada (based no doubt on Lever's own Canadian adventures, and his own canoe, in fact). They are pictured on the left side of the image, while Daly and Sandy stand fully in the present, in the centre of the image. On the far right, back in the past, lurks a grotesque Black Buffalo, 'greasy cheeks shaking, face looking like a tar lake in Demerara.' Phiz had no clue what an American Indian squaw looked like and was reduced to rely on his earlier grotesquerie.



Con Cregan (1849), The Camanches (p. 402).

In this image, author's intention and artist's realization fail to fuse. Phiz, always thrilled by the opportunity to draw horses, found this an opportunity to amuse himself. Lever writes:

While yet the yellow-glow of the hour bathed the earth, we saw the cane wigwams of the Camanches ... some squaws were seated on the banks, and a number of children were sporting in the stream ... Some mustangs, seemingly fresh caught, were picketed in a circle, and a few boys were amusing themselves, tormenting the animals into bounds and curvets ... The soft influence of the hour – the placid beauty of the picture. (*Con Cregan*, p. 403).

Serenity and placid beauty be damned! Look closely at the horses. They are not merely bounding and curveting, they are behaving very badly. One



Roland Cashel (1850), *Bravo Toro* (vol. I, p. 100).

tries to mount the horse next to him, another attempts a nip at a neatly rounded haunch, while its owner kicks back with both its hoofs. And look at the squaws and children. Apart from the occasional feather, they could be mistaken for figures on a Greek vase.

Roland Cashel probably represents the most successful collaboration between author and artist. Phiz was at the height of his powers (he illustrated *David Copperfield* in the same year). 'Bravo Toro' is particularly interesting because of its brilliant composition – it actually forms an "X", crossing the line from bull to rider with that of women to hat – and its powerful bull. But it is also important because it is one of Phiz's dark plates, in which he uses a ruling machine to cover the plate with lines – sometimes called machine tinting – which he can then lighten and darken to effect by judicious stopping out and burnishing. It was a time-consuming technique that he first tried out in *Dombey and Son* and used to stunning effect in *Bleak House*, but only occasionally employed after these books.

In this novel, Lever creates his most memorable heroine and Phiz captures her spirit. How different she is from Dickens's vapid, sentimental beauties! In this image, Mary Martin is clearly heroic, compassionate, and good-looking. The crowd, however, is not as successfully rendered, being a mixture of very odd-looking women and children, some elegant and some grotesque. In spite of his visits to Ireland, at Lever's request, to view the



The Martins Of Cro' Martin (1856), *Mary Martin's Levee* (vol. I, p. 8).



Davenport Dunn (1859), *The Faint* (vol. I, p. 120).

people at first hand, Phiz still seems to be having trouble defining their Irishness. In fact, some of these characters could be first cousins of those who populate the crowd scenes in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Phiz's dark plates make a sudden reappearance in *Davenport Dunn*, and 'The Faint' is a perfect example of the kind of atmosphere that can be created using this technique. Moving from dark to bright, Phiz burnishes rock faces, gaps between clouds, the top surface of a wall, trees and flowers, sheen on satin, and the moon itself.

Luttrell of Arran was the last book Phiz illustrated for Charles Lever (that is until the 1878 *Harry Lorrequer* edition, for which he provided four hopelessly inadequate wood engravings in each of the seven books which had originally appeared without pictures). 'Molly sees the ghost of "the Master"' appears close to the end of *Luttrell of Arran* and with this image he manages to bring his career as a popular illustrator full circle by reminding us of *Pickwick Papers*. With its smirking chair (nowhere in Lever's text) he makes a strong reference to John Leech's 'Tom Smart and the Chair', the image that Leech used as an 'audition' piece to persuade Dickens to give him work on *Pickwick Papers*. (Leech was too late, of course: Phiz already had the job, but Dickens would later use Leech to illustrate his Christmas books). In Lever's text (p. 280), Molly herself describes what she has seen:

May the blessed saints protect and guard us, Miss, but I seen him as plain as I see you ... Himself that's gone – the master ... I swear it on the book I saw him, and heard him too. "Would you be so kind –" says he; and at that I let a screech out of me and ran in here.

Phiz illustrates her as a living, breathing woman, recoiling in horror from the ghost she catches sight of beyond the limits of the picture. It is a terrific image, but he chooses to undermine it. What on earth persuades him to distract his viewer from the dramatic action by sticking a face on the chair and reducing the image to melodrama? It is his old itch to an-



Luttrell Of Arran (1865), 'Molly sees the ghost of 'the Master' (vol. II, p. 280).

thropomorphize, and it is hard to imagine that Lever was amused.

Phiz completes his work on *Luttrell* with three conventional images: the last picture in the book, the frontispiece, and the title page. (The frontispiece and title page were always included after the book was finished so that they could comment on the text that followed). All three are typical Phizzes, easily recognizable and appropriate to the text.

Lever's next few books were published without illustrations, which was probably the publisher's idea, and by the time the decision was made to include images again, Phiz had suffered a paralytic illness and was unable to control his etching needle. Luke Fildes, who had illustrated Dickens's last book, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, provided the images for Lever's last work, *Lord Kilgobbin*. Interestingly, it was Fildes himself who spearheaded the movement to provide Phiz with the annuity from the Royal Academy, given in gratitude for the artist's years of service in the public eye.

On Lever's last visit to Ireland, he dined at the University Club in Dublin. William Fitzpatrick writes that as he was receiving cordial greetings from friends, leaning with his back against a chiffonier on which some books lay, Lever sadly remarked that many once familiar faces had disappeared. 'You have still some old friends *at your back*' observed a friend, pointing behind Lever ... somebody having praised *Lorrequer*, Lever merely said, 'A poor thing – but how well Browne illustrated it'.⁴ This remark, spoken near the end of Lever's life is an eloquent testament to the enduring bond between the writer and his illustrator.

4. Fitzpatrick, p. 353.

DONNELL DEENY

THE EDUCATION OF CHARLES LEVER

Charles James Lever was born on 31 August 1806. As Fitzpatrick says, in his *Life of Lever*, he 'was not very accurately informed as regards his own age'.¹ He was inclined to assert that 1809 was the year of his birth. Although it is sometimes said that he was born in the North Strand, it had already had its name changed to Amiens Street prior to his birth and following the conclusion of the Anglo French Treaty of Amiens in 1802. This is a useful pointer to the society in which Lever was born. Ireland was slowly recovering from the horrors attendant upon the Rising of 1798, including the French intervention. This had been followed by the Act of Union. The re-naming of a street after this short-lived peace is indicative that the persons responsible for such matters in Dublin were fully involved in the long war being waged by England against France, in which this was to prove a short interlude. At this time the population of Ireland was roughly a third of the population of what was then known as the British Isles. This population makeup was fully reflected, I believe, in the Royal Navy and in the Army combating the French Revolution and, by 1806, Napoleon.

The house, now 35 Amiens Street is, happily, still in existence, although much altered. Lever's father was English. He had come to Dublin and prospered as a building contractor and he worked on some of the neoclassical buildings which have contributed to Dublin's glorious Georgian architectural heritage. Indeed, one of the largest, the Customs House, is barely 100 yards from his home, perhaps not accidentally. Lever's mother was Julia Candler, of a family who came to Ireland with Oliver Cromwell.

Knowledge of Lever's schooling seems to stem very largely from a document obtained by W. J. Fitzpatrick for his *Life of Lever* from a Mr Rosborough of Dublin. (Lionel Stevenson does not seem to have carried out any original research for *Dr Quicksilver* on this point, at least). However, that is a good source, as Rosborough was his next-door neighbour and contemporary school companion throughout his career. His first school was next door to his house, in the home of Mr Rosborough Senior, and was conducted by a Mr Ford:

1. Fitzpatrick, p. 1.

'Ford was addicted to the brutal habits of his time and class. He daily flogged with savage ferocity. Little Lever came in for his share; but it was not easy, even at that tender age ... (of 4) ... to beat out the buoyancy of his nature'. (*Ibid.*, p. 4).

It is pleasing to learn that on one occasion Ford unwisely beat the son of his landlord who, seeing the welts on his arms and back, that evening 'rushed upstairs to where Ford was reposing and seizing his own birch, which he bore like a sceptre, thrashed him with such vigour, that he ran yelling out of the house, and was not seen more' (*Ibid.*, p. 5).

Lever and Rosborough then proceeded to another school, only slightly further away at 56 William Street, conducted by a Mr Florence McCarthy. He had been a gifted student at Trinity College, Dublin but his Roman Catholicism disqualified him at that time from obtaining scholarship or fellowship in Trinity, and he was 'therefore driven to open a school'. (*Ibid.*, p. 6). Amongst the other boys were the two sons of Sir Charles Coote. As well as being a Baronet, Coote was a scholar and had published in 1804 his statistical survey of County Armagh, of which he says in his foreword: 'this fine county, so superior to all others in the great staple of the nation'. However, the son of Sir Charles was not a scholar and Lever, handsome, fair-haired, innocent looking and fat, took advantage of this to plant perverse principles in his mind, which the young Coote would in turn deliver 'with an air of pomposity and importance which threw the school into fits of laughter'. Lever had no talent himself for mathematics, which effectively precluded him from following his father's profession.

After McCarthy's school, Lever attended one kept by a Mr William O'Callaghan, at 113 Abbey Street, literally round the corner from his home. This street was later to give its name to the famous Abbey Theatre of Dublin. The picture that is painted there is of a talkative, laughing, popular boy whose rotundity did not preclude him from entering into boyish games. He threw himself into amateur dramatics, including the production of one of his own plays, a tragedy on the death of Nelson. Unhappily for Lever, the tragic climax of Nelson dying in the arms of Captain Hardy only induced loud laughter in the watching and rather tactless schoolmaster.²

It was now time for Lever to proceed to a secondary school, and he did so to the Academy kept by the Reverend George Newenham Wright at 2, Great Denmark Street. Again this was only a ten-minute walk from his home. When the family moved further out to Coolock he had a pony on which to make the journey. Although sources record that by then Lever was already well-known as a storyteller, although only 12 years of age, this

2. This information is extrapolated from Fitzpatrick, chapter 1.

did not mean that he escaped the corporal punishment, which was again rife in this school but perhaps he suffered less than some others. Wright himself was not without interest, having been a classical scholar who wrote a *Life of the Duke Wellington* and an historical guide to Dublin. However, Lever discovered that he had failed his final examination in the Greek Testament, and leaked this information to the boys whose respect and fear for Wright was lessened. He later went too far in dismissing a colleague and was himself forced to resign, and was replaced by the Reverend W. Jones.

The location of the school is of interest. It was next door to the home of the celebrated Lord Chief of Justice of Ireland, John Taylor, Baron Norbury (1800), and Earl of Norbury on his retirement in 1827. *The Judges in Ireland 1221-1921* describes Taylor as inherently a jovial foxhunting Tipperary gentleman with strong Protestant and Tory predilections. He was no stranger to favour. While Attorney General in the 1790s, his wife was made a Peeress in recognition of his intrepid opposition to 'the seditious and levellers'. The Earldom was asserted by Daniel O'Connell to have been an inducement, along with a pension of £ 3000 a year, to obtain his retirement from the Bench. He was then 88 years of age. He has in some circles a reputation as a hanging judge, having prosecuted the participants in the 1798 Rebellion, and presided over the trial of the participants in Robert Emmet's Rebellion of 1803 with more severity than dignity. Both his house and the school still exist – now combined as a small hotel. Happily, Lever is not forgotten in the latter, as an engraving of him sits on the receptionist's desk. There is some good plasterwork of the period to be seen inside.

Only a few doors from number 2, Great Denmark Street is Belvedere College, a day school conducted by the Jesuits. Its former pupils include that other great Dublin novelist, James Joyce, who attended it three quarters of a century after Lever had been at school. Apart from Dublin, the links between Joyce and Lever seem slight but I mention three. It is not often remembered that Joyce actually read Medicine for a short time, which he did in the Cecelia Street Medical School (overlapping with my grandfather). Secondly, although it seems not expressly mentioned in *Ulysses*, one of Lever's fictional creations is. At Section 12-1585, in the 1984 edition, the Speaker says of Leopold Bloom: 'Gob, he's like Lanty MacHale's goat that'd go a piece of the road with every one'. Don Gifford in his *Ulysses Annotated* explains that this is a reference to Charles Lever's poem 'Larry M'Hale' that celebrates M'Hale's willingness 'to ride with the rector and drink with the priest'. Thirdly, both spent some years in Trieste, more important for Joyce than Lever. Indeed he apparently always referred to his magnum opus in its Italian form: *Ulisse*, as it was largely written while

he lived in that Italian speaking but then Austro-Hungarian city. Indeed, John McCourt, in the *Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920*, says that Joyce read *Lord Kilgobbin* while in Trieste and later sprinkled several allusions to Lever's novels in *Finnegan's Wake*.

Lever completed his education at the age of 16, as was customary at the time in Ireland. What can we draw from this brief survey of that schooling? One notes the schools that he did *not* go to. The future Duke of Wellington had been sent across the water to Eton, as Irish gentlemen from time to time were and are. His background was clearly much grander than that of Lever. The future Lord Castlereagh of Congress of Vienna fame was content, or his father was, with Armagh Royal School, a generation before, which continued to draw pupils from all over Ireland, but Lever was not sent there. He was not sent to Portora, where Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett were later pupils. He was not sent to Clongowes Wood College, which Joyce immortalised in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, although it was available, having been founded in 1814.

Clearly, the absence of religious stridency, that is characteristic of Lever, did not extend so far as sending a boy of the Anglican tradition to a Jesuit school. Perhaps it is slightly more surprising that he did not go to two well-established schools in Dublin at the time, both of which still exist, albeit changed. One was Kings Hospital, also known as the Blue Coat School, then situated in a handsome Georgian building on the north side of the River Liffey, like Lever's home. Examining its history on its website, one can surmise that it still had an emphasis on providing an education to the children of indigent Dublin citizens who required free schooling. Likewise the Marine School, now part of Mount Temple (and thus the *alma mater* of the famous rock band U2), catered for the sons and orphans of naval and sea officers. It also had a handsome building, sadly now gone, just across the river from Lever's home. There is a particular resonance here as Lever's future wife, Kate Baker, is described by Dr. John F. Waller as living in the Marine School. Even as a schoolboy Lever used to court her by bringing her flowers, which were thrown, through the iron gate of the courtyard. Fitzpatrick, in a footnote (p. 19), doubts that this was the Marine School because he says the directories 'failed to notice this academy until subsequent to Lever's scholastic course'. However Messrs Poole and Cash, in their *Views of the Most Remarkable Public Buildings, Monuments and Other Edifices in the City of Dublin* (1780), not only state that the Marine School was indeed opened at Sir John Rogerson's Quay in 1773, but provide a fine engraving of a nine bay rusticated neoclassical building. Kate's father was an administrator with the navy, which may explain her living there at that time.

Why then did he go to these private and, as it proved, ephemeral institutions? One factor might be a desire on the part of his parents to keep a loving son very close to them, rather than sending him to board outside Dublin, but this does not explain overlooking at least two of the schools named above. A more important factor may have been the one identified by Fitzpatrick (p. 15): "Not a little blue blood, indeed, coursed through the youth of this school. Early association with them imbued him with an aspiring aim, and the worthy builder showed his usual tact in placing Charles in a higher social position than he himself enjoyed".

It should be remembered that, according to *The Concise Dictionary of National Biography* (1979), Lever's uncle, Ashton, was a sufficiently distinguished collector in the field of natural science to found a museum and receive a knighthood in 1778. Stevenson considers the claim to close kinship by Lever's father as 'highly questionable', but the fact that it was made is surely significant. One might also remember Oscar Wilde's dictum that Dublin was the most snobbish city in the world. As a Northern Irishman educated in the South, I used to think that there was a tendency for people in the north of the island to pretend to have less money than they have, while in Dublin the reverse was true. Lever's own elder brother, John, in his recollections, clearly enjoyed the company of the landed gentry, particularly when he encountered County Galway where part of his ministry was served. His younger brother would there have obtained on holidays a form of social education in the high-spirited and hard-riding habits of East Galway. Its broad fields provided both the money and the opportunity for the sort of equine adventures beloved of Charles O'Malley and his peers. That tradition continued. One remembers that W. B. Yeats stayed at Coole Park in that county with Lady Gregory, whose late husband was very much of that stock. Her son Robert, the subject of several of Yeats' greatest poems, was himself an exceptional horseman. He was a fighter ace on the Italian front in the First World War, credited with shooting down nineteen enemy aircraft, until 'he was shot down in error by an Italian pilot'. (*Robert Gregory, A Centenary Tribute*). The Galway Blazers are one of several hunts still carrying on some of those traditions today.

I hope I may be forgiven this digression, but I think it contributes to one's understanding of Lever as somebody who came from the commercial middle classes but enjoyed the company of, and to a degree aspired to, the habits of what were then called the upper classes. His education was consistent with this, and may have contributed to a slight want of discipline on his part and to acquiring habits of extravagance that led him to be dogged by debts all his life. Dr. J. B. Lyons, in his *Brief Lives of Irish Doctors 1600-1965*, quotes Lever as follows: 'People call me extravagant, and in a sense I am, no doubt: but

this life is to me not merely a luxury but a necessity'. It was, after all, as Lyons points out, a source of inspiration, anecdotes and plots.

Charles Lever went to Trinity College, Dublin in 1822. Trinity is the sole college of the University of Dublin, and was founded in 1592. Not only is it the oldest university in Ireland, but also, most would agree, the most beautiful. (I declare an interest as a Trinity graduate). It consists of a series of largely eighteenth century squares built in the neo-classical style. Lever obtained a BA by 1827. It can be seen that he rather stretched the course, as the normal degree period is four years rather than five. Every indication is that he enjoyed his university days immensely, without attending unduly to his academic studies. Chapter 17 of *Charles O'Malley* paints a picture of one or two of the more hilarious incidents of his time. The opening paragraph of chapter 15 of that novel succinctly conveys the way of life of Lever's hero, modelled no doubt on the way of life that he did enjoy, or would have wished to enjoy, when an undergraduate:

Within a few weeks after my arrival in town I had become a matriculated student of the University, and the possessor of chambers within its walls, in conjunction with the sage and prudent gentleman I have introduced to my readers in the last chapter. Had my intentions on entering college been of the most studious and regular kind, the companion into whose society I was then immediately thrown would have quickly dissipated them. He voted morning chapels a bore, Greek lectures a humbug, examination a farce, and pronounced the statute book with its attendant train of fines and punishment, an 'unclean thing'. With all my country habits and predilections fresh upon me, that I was an easily won disciple to his code need not be wondered at, and indeed, ere many days had passed over, my thorough indifference to all college rules and regulations had given me a high place in the esteem of Webber and his friends. As for myself, I was most agreeably surprised to find that what I had looked forward to as a very melancholy banishment, was likely to prove a most agreeable sojourn. Under Webber's direction, there was no hour of the day that hung heavily upon our hands: we rose about eleven and breakfasted; after which succeeded fencing, sparring, billiards, or tennis in the park; about three we got on horseback, and either cantered in the Phoenix or about the squares till visiting time; after which we made our calls and then dressed for dinner, which we never thought of taking at commons, but had it from Morrison's – we both being reported sick in the Dean's list, and thereby exempt from the meagre fare of the fellows' table. In the evening our occupations became still more pressing; there were balls, suppers, whist parties, rows at the theatre, shindies in the street, devilled drumsticks at Hayes's, select oyster parties at the Carlingford; in fact, every known method of remaining up all night and appearing both pale and penitent the following morning.

McDowell and Webb, in their *Trinity College Dublin 1592 – 1952*, identified two contrasting aspects of the University of that time. On the positive side is a marked increase in numbers of students. The negative side they described thus, at page 85:

All these factors combined to produce in the atmosphere of Dublin a change that is at once obvious if the society of Barrington's *Reminiscences* were compared with that of Lever's early novels. Barrington, admittedly, was writing for a Regency public which liked its memoirs well spiced and garnished, but all the same the contrast is significant. The society described by Barrington is exuberant, self-assured, and never lacking in poise. Lever's, though full of high spirits, is shaded by Philistinism and shabby-gentility. And on a more serious level a similar change can be seen. The outlook of the 18th century was essentially aristocratic – at its best spacious, self-confident and generous, at its worse short-sighted, arrogant and spendthrift. The Irish Protestant of the early 19th century soon developed the virtues and vices of the middle class, and with them an outlook on politics and religion that was at once deeper and narrower than that of his father.

These sentiments may well echo Lever's own views expressed in chapter 8 of *The O'Donoghue* (1845). That same chapter, to which Tony Bareham was kind enough to refer me, conveys graphically the emotional collapse of a young man deprived, he feels unfairly, of a long sought scholarship.

The premier undergraduate society in Trinity College, Dublin, is and was, the College Historical Society. Founded in 1770, it grew out of the Historical Club of 1753, founded by the philosopher and politician Edmund Burke. Its Officers in its early decades not only included many of the future rulers of Ireland but the patriots Theobald Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet. Perhaps of more interest to a literary audience is Thomas Lefroy, later Lord Chief Justice, who was nearly engaged to Jane Austen, the novelist, until his family intervened to prevent him marrying such an obscure and penniless girl. She was devastated. She never married. He did and had the satisfaction, when attacked in the House of Commons for being too old to perform his judicial duties, of being defended by his own son, Thomas Lefroy QC, MP who was then himself 66 years old. The Hist, incidentally, believes itself to be the oldest University Debating Society in the world. I was interested to learn from Professor Mario Curreli that Italian universities would not have student societies of such antiquity.

Regrettably for Charles Lever, the Society had been expelled from College on 1 February 1815 because of the radical views expressed in some of its debates. It did exist to some degree as an external Society in the 1820s but the records are incomplete. Charles Lever is not named as an Officer or Medallist in these exiguous records. However on 31 March 1825 a petition was prepared for presentation to the Board of the College. It read:

To The Reverend and Learned The Provost and Senior Fellows of Trinity College Dublin:

We, the Undersigned Graduates and Undergraduates, deeply sensitive of the anxiety, ever evinced by your reverend and learned Board for the advancement of the Stu-

dents in the different branches of useful knowledge, and humbly hoping that our present unrivalled state of discipline may be received as an evidence of our dispositions, and as a pledge that we shall in all cases, continue to render a strict obedience to any regulations that your Reverend and Learned Board may judge it expedient to prescribe – humbly solicit the permission of your Reverend and Learned Board to form within the College under such rules and regulations as your Reverend and Learned Board may impose, An Historical Society, for the purpose of improving our knowledge of Modern History and acquiring that facility in Composition and Speaking which the nature of our future Professions imperatively requires.

Among the 227 signatories to the Petition was Charles Lever. The Board did not accede to the request. Perhaps things were closer to the picture painted in *Charles O'Malley* than the 'unrivalled state of discipline' claimed by the signatories. The Society was only readmitted to the College in 1843. A few years after Lever left Trinity the Society records do record the prominence as Officer and Medallist of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, well known as a novelist, particularly of the occult, as in *The House by the Church Yard* and *Uncle Silas*. In 1951 a slim volume was published, called *Of One Company*, consisting of biographical studies of Famous Trinity Men (sic). Lever not insignificantly but disappointingly does not appear, but two writers do. As well as Oscar Wilde, Le Fanu is dealt with. Christine, Countess of Longford (an early patron of Orson Welles), notes that Le Fanu appears to have only made one trip outside the British Isles. 'When he wrote of vampires in Styria (and *Camilla* is the best vampire story ever written), he used material given to him by Charles Lever, who had taken the Lever family to economise in a Schloss'. Note that Lever's idea of economy was to stay in a *Schloss* not a *Hutte*. To complete this digression it may be noted that the author of *Dracula*, which some might now think the most famous vampire story, was also not only a Trinity man but Auditor of the Historical Society. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* says that *Dracula* was influenced by *Camilla*. The reference to a Schloss reminds us that Lever's travels stretched across much of Western Europe although pride of place in his affections certainly went to his beloved Italy. I feel sure he was conscious of and may even from time to time at fashionable tables in London Society have quoted the dictum of Doctor Samuel Johnson; 'A man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority'. The remark is all the more telling in that Johnson had not made that journey himself.

Lever allots to his hero O'Malley the rooms he himself had occupied in college: 2 Old Square. Fitzpatrick wrongly says these are in the square known as Botany Bay, so called from its slight remoteness from the rest of the then college, but also from its somewhat desolate air, evocative to some

of the Australian penal colony. However, if one examines the matter, it is clear Lever meant No. 2 Front Square, as it is now known. In one way that is a slight pity as the novelist Patrick O'Brian wrote his final novel, *Blue at the Mizzen*, while living in the second house in Botany Bay as a guest of the Provost.

Lever commenced to study for a BA in medicine at Trinity, graduating in 1831. Subsequently he was to fail his examination for the licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. He was so disappointed by his performance on the first day of examination that he declined to enter the second day, and declined again to re-sit the examination, which he could have done. The position was that since 1786, by an Act of the Irish Parliament, Trinity College jointly with the College of Physicians could train and licence physicians. Its principal but not only competitor in the island was the Royal College of Surgeons. Both these institutions still have separate medical schools, 200 yards apart. The Trinity Medical School was then enjoying something of a golden era, partly because of James McCartney, who was Professor of Anatomy and Chirurgery. There were ongoing disputes between Surgeons – as it is known – and Trinity, which culminated in Trinity instituting its own licentiate in surgery in 1851.

Lever's qualification of the BA in medicine without the LRCSI is described, not unreasonably, by Stephenson, as 'unorthodox' but it did permit him to practice medicine. It will be recalled that in the eighteenth century physicians rather looked down on surgeons. The latter had not long before been known as barber-surgeons because their skill with the blade grew out of the shaving of men's beards. Physicians were called doctor but surgeons were not entitled to that appellation. By a curious historical survival, male Fellows of the Royal Colleges of Surgery in Britain and Ireland cease to be addressed as doctor and start to be addressed as mister when they have passed that important postgraduate examination, the preliminary to becoming consultant surgeons. The mark of shame has become a mark of distinction.

McDowell reminds us that the study of anatomy, before the passing of the Anatomy Act of 1832, required sordid methods of obtaining bodies including the bribery of church sextons. Indeed at this very time in Edinburgh the notorious Burke and Hare moved on from disinterring the newly dead to cold-blooded murder in order to supply the voracious demand for corpses from the teachers of anatomy.

All the same his lack of academic success did mean that Lever was unlikely to rise to the forefront of medicine in Dublin, but had to content himself at first with badly paid and dangerous work in dealing with a cholera epidemic in the West of Ireland. He then acquired appointment as

a dispensary doctor at the little town of Portstewart near Coleraine in Northern Ireland.

In the *Knight of Gwynne* Lever writes that 'it was one of those cool, showery, blustery days which the inhabitants of the north coast of Ireland dignify with the term summer'. A more sympathetic view of the seaside resort of Portstewart is to be found at the hand of another somewhat neglected Irish writer, Sydney Bernard Smith, who was brought up in the town. The opening poem of his first collection *Girl with Violin* (Dolmen Press, 1968) is entitled 'Portstewart' and I venture to quote from it.

Portstewart

Derry's contours lap the sea
around the Bann; fishermen
row dumbly to their nets, and visitors
parade the prom, or rendezvous
at tennish, in the Diamond.

Boldly, the square-edged Protestant
church attacks the hill; our own –
yellow, smooth-faced, elided, star of the sea,
into the Crescent; we confess,
emerge, gaze at the Rock.

I have been creeping there for years
in dreams; not wanting to return
to dwell in the foreign land of youth, but in
search of the place's unsoured peace;
wet roads, cars on the strand,

Hedges of hawthorn between the fields
to Burnside, here my father's grave –
the trees echo loud with untutored rooks –
unassuming like the man
who lies in the earth, awake.

There is no violence here in colour,
in language, thought, or in myself;
there is, even, at this distance, no sorrow;
a sense of family, of belonging,
almost a sense of love.

In the course of his fairly leisurely studies, Lever made an extended visit to Germany, taking some lectures at Gottingen and later visiting Weimar, where he had the pleasure of listening to, but not exactly conversing with, Goethe. The great man preferred the circle of adoring visitors to listen more than speak, which must have been a penance for the loquacious Lever.

This brief summary of the education of Lever is now almost concluded, save for one happy footnote and a few observations. In 1870 his *alma mater* conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. Fitzpatrick records (p. 349) that 'he had long relinquished his early title of Dr Lever; he now reassumed it with satisfaction'. This is borne out by the title page of his last novel and the only one published after his doctorate, namely *Lord Kilgobbin*, where on the title page of 1872 the author is described as Charles Lever, LL. D. (Not so on the first U.S. edition of the same year). When troubled with his eyes on that visit to Dublin to receive his doctorate, he visited one of the leading surgeons of the city, his old friend Sir William Wilde, better known now as the father of Oscar Wilde, Lever's successor in the distinguished line of Irish writers.

Two authors whose fame has lasted rather better than Lever's are Somerville and Ross. In a *Life* of their ancestor Charles Kendall Bushe, another Lord Chief Justice of Ireland (pages 178-180), they quote a lengthy passage from chapter xii of *Harry Lorrequer*, about a dinner party given for the future Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, at which he overhears Bushe's elegant conversation and enquires about him from his neighbour, who had been put beside him accidentally in place of a more famous brother. Somerville and Ross described this as an example of 'Lever's supreme command of the Irish idiom'. I quote only briefly. Peel, then Chief Secretary of Ireland, is told that Bushe is a leading barrister with a way with juries:

'Can you oblige me by giving me any idea of the manner in which he obtains such signal success in this branch of eloquence?' 'I'll tell ye', said Dennis, leisurely finishing his glass, and smacking his lips with the air of a man girding up his loins for a mighty effort, 'I'll tell ye, well, ye see the way he has is this' – here Mr Peel's expectation rose to the highest degree of interest – 'The way he has is this with the juries – he first butters them up, and then he sloothers them down! That's all, devil a more of a secret there's in it!'

I hope this short passage, which digresses rather from my subject, is excusable in giving a possible additional clue to the neglect of Lever, namely that the whole world about which he wrote is neglected. The elegant and able Irish of the nineteenth century, Protestant or Catholic, are unknown to a public nowadays that just about remembers the names of a few patriots, but to whom otherwise the nineteenth century is a blank sheet, with the single tragic blot of the great famine. Lever, a literary artist of the middle of that period has disappeared with his canvas. It is noticeable that L. P. Curtis Junior, in *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (1971), makes no criticism of Lever or of Phiz but, correctly, concentrates his fire on others of the 1860s and 1870s. This fits in with Henry

Boylan's comment in his *Dictionary of Irish Biography* when speaking of Samuel Lover: 'Lover's name is often coupled with that of his contemporary, Lever, as an exploiter of the "stage Irishman" myth, and this has caused the real merits of much of the work to be overlooked'.

Let us hope that the twenty-first century will look on nineteenth century Ireland and on Charles Lever more favourably than did the twentieth.

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TONY BAREHAM

REBELS AND REACTIONARIES

It seems to me remarkable that Lever, a middle-class Anglo-Irish Protestant with strong links to the English Tory party, and pilloried in his own day by Irish Nationalists as a renegade and turncoat, and as an author whose fiction degraded the Irish people, manifests unflinching sympathy with viewpoints diametrically opposite to everything this pre-supposes. Consistently in his work there appears a group of characters whose mindset represents points of view beyond the pale of society's accepted social and political norms, and towards whom the author is manifestly sympathetic, whilst many characters that are firmly planted at the accepted centre of things are despicable or downright detestable.

Rebel: 'One who resents or resists authority or grievous conditions' says the dictionary. Lever is often deeply understanding of resenters and resisters. The psychology of characters such as Tom Burke, Mark O'Donoghue, Maurice Tiernay and Daniel Donogan in *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872),¹ are treated sympathetically. In many cases they are the people who evolve, who show potential for change, whereas most of the 'Establishment' figures to whom they are opposed are static, fixed, lacking a potential to develop. The chronology of the novels shows the rebel to be a consistent figure in Lever's mature writing career. Indeed, he becomes a significant novelist only after he commences to concentrate on 'the rebel' – from *Tom Burke of 'Ours'* (1844), onwards.

The early novels are rollicking tales of subaltern life and easy affections, of hunting and duelling in the Irish Wild West. In *Charles O'Malley* (1841), be it said, Lever got this formula exactly right. *O'Malley* is a wonderful *jeu d'esprit*, but it is a disservice to the novelist Lever became that this should be *all* that is remembered. It is as though Dickens were to be valued only for Pickwick.

Tom Burke of 'Ours' is a deliberate counter-weight to the ebullient tone and character of *Charles O'Malley*. Tom's is a world of alienation, exile, and disillusionment. He experiences every sad emotion from which the

1. For convenience I have cited all publication dates as for first edition in volume form. Several of the early novels made prior appearances in parts or serially.

magic of Lever's protective optimism shields O'Malley. This is where Lever proves himself for the first time to be more than merely a popular entertainer.

Reactionary: 'one who attempts to revert to past political conditions, or one who shows a backward tendency from revolution, reform or progress'.

Lever's work is replete with explorations of characters that fit this definition. They come from the middle-class for the main part, they live ostensibly at the centre of society, and they are often the cornerstones of the community. Such figures do not feature meaningfully in *Harry Lorrequer* (1839/40), *Charles O'Malley*, or *Arthur O'Leary* (1844). Perhaps the first hint of this character-type appears in *Jack Hinton* (1843), but only peripherally. Hinton's mother is the shadowy prototype of the society bitch that Lever portrays so well in his later books, and the amiable puppy-ism that Hinton himself often evinces is a foretaste of manners which become studiously obnoxious in some of his later military figures.

Lever served as Her Majesty's Vice Consul at La Spezia (1858-67), then Consul at Trieste (1867, until his death in 1872). He knew politicians and diplomats intimately. His own consular appointments were very much grace and favour affairs (which didn't stop him grumbling about the remuneration, one may add!). He was fascinated by the military, and was proud of his honorary Colonelcy in the Derry militia. His novels include many studies of soldiers and his own sad, scapegrace son Charley was commissioned in the British army. For all this, Lever's soldiers in the later books are often deeply unsympathetic figures, and his politicians and diplomats something worse.

The political flux of mid-century Europe permeates his fiction. He lived in Belgium, in Germany, and then, for most of his creative life, in Italy. His novels make intelligent and germane use of contrasting place and circumstance. Real historical events and characters are interfused with fictional matters, and often his Continental episodes cross-refer to matters in his native Ireland. He witnessed and indeed participated in convulsive changes in the boundaries and the ethos of the Continent and, though living as a self-imposed exile, he never lost interest in the affairs of his homeland.

He is fascinated by these times of flux, and uses such focal moments to create character contrasts – people who shape the new worlds contrasting with those who cling, whether actively or passively, to the old. One consistent group of his reactionaries – those figures who deprecate the new world order – are elderly; *The O'Donoghue*, *The Knight of Gwynne*, *Lord Kilgobbin*.

His revolutionaries – virtually all of them young people – are astray in what they perceive as an imperfect but perfectible present, with their eyes confidently on the future. Many are idealists, but once or twice Lever

draws telling pictures of the expedientist rebel – like Napper Tandy in *The O'Donoghue* (1845). Whilst his reactionaries hanker for a stable and congenial past, which they nostalgically idealise, the present and the implied future never justify the rebels' optimism. It is ironically the case that the glorious past is perceived in authorial overview to represent a willful self-indulgence and it is seldom a source of anything capable of permanence or equitable social value; all Lever's reactionaries, old or young, are intensely selfish.

Lever, born in 1806, just missed The Act of Union that traumatized politics in Ireland for the next twenty years at least, but it is present imaginatively in his fiction time and again as an absolute watershed for his characters. *The Knight of Gwynne* (1847) for example, documents the deep disruptions and divisions caused by the voluntary loss of national political identity – not through revolution or invasion but by means of connivance, political chicanery, and weak will. The Union was a peaceful change in Irish politics, but for Lever's reactionaries it was a sneaking, cheating, deeply obnoxious thing, probably more despicable than open rebellion.

The Knight's own character mirrors the political struggle. He is spendthrift, reckless, irresponsible, but he is generous to a fault, chivalrous and charismatic. 'Old' Ireland is ruined by the same causes of quixotic excess as the Knight himself. Neither can cope with impinging modernity and change. Lever is always sensitive to that watershed between the charisma of pre-Union Ireland, and the new expediencies of the post-Union world he actually inhabits.

Several of Lever's novels describe major moments of flux; either the French Revolution, the abortive invasion of Ireland by post-revolutionary France, or the Act of Union. He perceives them as key moments in the unhappy evolution of the world around him. Lever himself was, of course, witness to and participant in convulsive political changes centering upon the European 'year of revolutions' in 1848.

The French Revolution is luridly described in the opening chapters of *Maurice Tiernay* (1850-51). Lever shows the successful overthrow of an old reactionary order via bloodshed and anarchy. He clearly abhors the bloodshed, the destruction of social decencies and the anarchy such out-and-out rebellion inevitably causes. The French Revolution serves as a fixed extreme, as an exemplar of brutally enforced change. No surprise here, but his sympathy for Tiernay, a son of the Revolution, is surprising.

The abortive invasion of Ireland by the French in 1798 is described in both *Maurice Tiernay* and *The O'Donoghue*. In both novels Revolutionary incursion is supported by the basest element of Irish libertarianism, yet defeat of the invaders never promises a millennial future. Lever's fictional

account of these events is of course meliorated by the fact that the reader knows the incursion will be unsuccessful. The author makes meaningful use of deploying real historical events in his fictional narrative. In both novels, however, there is a strand of authorial sympathy for individuals who are caught up in the bloody whirlwind. Lever offers a convincing psychological explanation of the rebelliousness of Maurice Tiernay, as he does in shrewdly differentiated circumstances for Tom Burke, and Mark O'Donoghue. All three are psychologically traumatised by early experiences, and the course of the rebellion going on around them makes escape virtually impossible. Rebellion shapes and damages them.

In *The Knight of Gwynne* we move to another stage of social change; there is no bloodshed, but despicable human traits permeate political and social relationships. If this is evolution and not revolution, then Lever's heart can see little ultimate difference. Here again the individual trapped in the flux of social change struggles unavailingly to assert his better nature.

For his third period of revolution the mature Lever had merely to look around himself. He wrote to his friend Alexander Spencer in July 1848:

Up to this moment, Florence is the only tranquil spot in Europe. Naples, Rome, Vienna, Baden, Paris, all convulsed; but here the slightest disturbance is unknown. The truth is, there is a quiet peace-loving population, and a government so mild as to be no government at all. I have often been tempted [he adds] to send over something about the war in Lombardy to the English papers, who have uniformly agreed up to this in disseminating the most gross and absurd falsehoods about it.²

He even played a personal part in the upheaval:

The English Government, hoping for the restoration of the Grand Duke, wished to convey a secret message of encouragement to General de Langier, commander of the loyal forces which were lurking in the mountains. Choosing a moment when Guerrazzi, the rebel dictator, had gone away on an expedition to annex some border territory, Sir Hamilton Seymour [the English ambassador in Florence] tried to find a loyalist to carry the message; but not a single Florentine would undertake the difficult and dangerous mission. Lever thereupon volunteered, not because 'he had any very high estimation of a cause which the sovereign himself had not the firmness to stand by', but because 'he detested the insolent domination of a set of dishonourable agitators, and abhorred the rule of the stiletto and the rabble.'

He passed through the lines of the revolutionists at Pietra Santa by posing as an English tourist, and penetrated into the Apennines, where he encountered deep snow and ice. ... At a frontier village he slipped past Guerrazzi and his bodyguard, deep in a noisy revel. Finally, after a journey of sixteen hours – eleven of them on foot – he ran de Langier to earth where he was encamped in a field with a score of followers, and delivered his despatch.

2. Downey, vol. I, p. 283.

‘Alas!’ said the general, ‘all is too late. There is no more an army to lead to victory. I have nothing but these.’

Feeling certain that Florence was sick of the revolutionists and would heartily support a restoration, Lever proposed a *coup de main*: de Langier’s party had but to hasten back to the little tavern at Lavenza, where Guerrazzi and his friends would be by that time in a drunken stupor, and, by capturing the dictator and his henchmen, paralyse the heart of the insurrection. De Langier fully concurred in the idea that if this attempt could be made successfully, the restoration would ensue; but, to Lever’s fury and amazement, nothing could induce him to believe the plan feasible. ... Lever went home in such disgust at this pusillanimity that he felt tempted to quit the country.³

Lever risked his neck to help the reactionary establishment, not because he believed it was millennial or even progressive, but because it represented a compromise with common humanity fairer than anything implicit in popular rebellion. He was an eminently practical, even a worldly man. But fair-mindedness marks his judgments – a dichotomy that enriches the structure of those novels that contrast revolution and reaction. His essay on Garibaldi exemplifies his personal attitude:

It is not easy to conceive anything finer, simpler, more thoroughly unaffected, or more truly dignified, than the man himself. ... The true measure of the man lies in the fact that, though his life has been a series of the boldest and most daring achievements, his courage is about the very last quality uppermost in your mind when you meet him. It is of the winning softness of his look and manner, his kind thoughtfulness for others, his sincere pity for all suffering, his gentleness, his modesty, his manly sense of brotherhood with the very humblest of the men who have loved him, that you think: these are the traits that throw all his heroism into shadow; and all the glory of the conqueror pales before the simple virtues of the man.⁴

This is Lever’s *beau idéal* of the gentleman revolutionary, the rebel *sans peur et sans reproche*.

Truth raises its cautious head; Stevenson records the following in *Dr Quicksilver*:

It was at the time of the Fenian affair in Ireland that Garibaldi breakfasted with Lever at Spezia, and I am not sure that the affair may not have been done in concert with the British Minister at Florence. Garibaldi had been writing strong letters of sympathy with the Fenians, and Lever explained to him very clearly at breakfast that if he continued to do so, he would destroy all sympathy the English might have for him and his further plans for Italy. From that date there was no further mention made of Garibaldi’s name in connection with Fenianism.⁵

3. *Dr Quicksilver*, pp. 176-77.

4. Charles Lever (pseudonymously): *Cornelius O’Dowd Upon Men and Women etc. First Series*, pp. 123-33, *passim*.

5. *Dr Quicksilver*, p. 248.

Lever is very aware of the ambiguous cyclic flux of history. It is one of the things that make *Tom Burke* an intelligent account of the Napoleonic period. And he is painfully aware how clique-ish prejudice vitiates dispassionate judgment. Defending *The O'Donoghue* against charges of Repealism (a charge that haunted his editorship of the *Dublin University Magazine*), he said:

For the life of me I cannot detect it. Certain of the characters are not conspicuous for loyalty, it is true; but if they were all staunch Tories, I am not sure the book would be more readable. ... I have tried to bring Irish gentlemen into better repute, not by exaggerated pictures of good qualities so much as by correct delineation of the state of society in which they live.⁶

Downey puts it thus:

Many of his critics ... assert that his sketches of Hibernian life are hopelessly out of drawing, that his gross exaggeration smudges the picture. ... This class of criticism is born either of ignorance or of jealousy or of crassness. Many an Irish reader professes to hold the belief that because Lever occasionally treads upon a pet corn he was impregnated with a savage desire to stamp violently on the foot of the patriot, eager to offer him a jibe or a sneer in lieu of an apology. ... Whatsoever his political opinions, his sympathies were as Irish as the Wicklow hills ...⁷

Lever will not conform to the hot-house notions of Nationalism, which fostered a school of writing in his own day, and which are alive and still kicking, and that represent a painful manifestation of the spirit of blinkered partiality bedeviling Ireland even yet, and in contexts sadly more urgent than those of the Anglo-Irish novel.

In *Tom Burke* Lever transcends easy political stances. The themes of alienation, exile and self-delusion make this novel sadder (and thus, for many, less rewarding) than its predecessors. In turning his back upon the irresponsible adventures of Lorrequer, O'Malley and Hinton, Lever was perceived to be betraying his readership. This in itself was an act of creative courage on his part; the outcome, however sore on his established reputation, began the process of turning him into a significant novelist.

Young Tom is cheated of his paternal inheritance. He becomes a wanderer and exile under the tutelage of the charismatic rebel, Darby the Blast, whose influence is potent in shaping Burke's view of insurrection:

[Darby] spoke freely of his own share in the eventful year of 'Ninety-eight'; justifying, as it then seemed to me, every step of the patriotic party, and explaining the causes

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-42.

7. Downey, vol. I, pp. 187-88.

of their lack of success so naturally and so clearly, that I could not help following with interest every detail of his narrative. ... As he warmed to his subject, he spoke of France with an enthusiasm that I soon found contagious ... and of that wonderful man, of whom I then heard for the first time, as spreading a halo of victory over his nation...⁸

Later, British soldiers burn down the cabin in which Tom has received the first kindness and hospitality of his life. His affection-seeking sensibility is filled with false notions of the justification of rebellion. Burke then falls under the influence of one of the French officers who came secretly to Ireland to aid the insurgents. Charles de Meudon fills young Tom with romantic and idealistic notions of Napoleon. The uneasy swing from uncritical admiration of rebellion to glorification of militarism confuses Tom's inexperienced sensibility. De Meudon praises the soldier Bonaparte as a national saviour; Darby paints the English soldiery as:

merely actuated by the basest of passions, the slaves of tyranny. All the atrocities ... (Darby) ... mentioned of the military in the past year came up before me, and with them the brave resistance of the people in their struggle for independence ... Every gloomy circumstance in my own fate seemed as a result of that grinding oppression ... and when I rose from my bed that morning, I was a rebel with all my soul.⁹

De Meudon counters this populist fervour:

You must not join these people, Tom. The day is gone by when anything great or good could have been accomplished. The horrors of civil war will ever prevent good men from uniting themselves to a cause which has no other road save through bloodshed ... France is your country: there liberty has been won; there lives one great man, whose notice, were it but passingly bestowed, is fame.¹⁰

By the end of the novel Burke has been forced from Napoleon's army, disillusioned and unjustly disgraced:

As a boy, high-flown, vague, and unsettled ideas of national liberty and independence had made me look to France as the emancipator of Europe. As a man, I knew that the lust of conquest had extinguished the love of freedom in Frenchmen; that they who trusted to her did but exchange the domination of the old masters for the tyranny of a new one; while such as boldly stepped forward in defense of their liberties, found that there was neither mercy nor compassion for the conquered.¹¹

To compound the irony, towards the end of the novel he is offered (and refuses) a Colonelcy in the forces of the restored Bourbon monarch.

Tom Burke investigates the nature of rebellion and self-delusion as they

8. *Tom Burke of 'Ours'*, vol. I, cap. iii, p. 35.

9. *Ibid.*, vol. I, cap. v, p. 52.

10. *Ibid.*, vol. I, cap. x, p. 102.

11. *Ibid.*, vol. II, cap. lxxviii, pp. 379-80.

are worked upon by unscrupulous agencies, both rebel and reactionary.

I could not absolve my heart of the early folly which made me suppose that the regeneration of a land should be accomplished by the efforts of a sanguinary and bigoted rabble. To this error could I trace every false step I made in life. To this cause could I attribute the long struggle I endured between my love of liberty and my detestation of mob rule; and yet how many years did it cost me to learn, that to alleviate the burdens of the oppressed may demand a greater exercise of tyranny than ever their rulers practiced towards them. Like many others, I looked to France as the land of freedom; but where was despotism so unbounded!? where the sway of one great mind so unlimited? They had bartered liberty for equality.¹²

Many of Lever's reactionaries are political dinosaurs, ultra-conservatives, nostalgic sentimentalists or self-concerned expedientists. They hanker for a past that exists only in their imagination. Such characters retreat physically and mentally from the chaotic mess created by their own feckless management into a nostalgic idealism. Such men are dangerous. Both Wolfe Tone and Napper Tandy – often perceived as Irish 'liberators' – fare badly in Lever's pages. The overriding impression is of men guided by false ideals, and often of character too partial and too unstable to offer any hope of meliorating the moment of rebellion into a benevolent future. Whether or not Lever's assessment of the 'real' Tone and the 'real' Tandy is accurate is beside the point; it is interesting and significant that he makes these characters uncongenial by associating them with opportunism and expediency.

There are other classes of reactionary too, more potent and disturbing than such superannuated Irish spendthrifts as The Knight of Gwynne or old O'Donoghue, more insidious than the populist agitators such as Tandy. One group, as already noted, comprises the officer class of the British army. The most extraordinary of Lever's soldiers is Ensign Harry Calvert in *A Rent in A Cloud* (1869):

'Do you like soldiering?'

'Hate it! abhor it! It's all very well when you join first ... You are eager to be treated like a man ... One's first three months at mess seemed to be the cream of existence.'

'Is it really so jolly? Are the fellows good talkers?'

'About the worst in the universe, but to a young hand, they are enchantment. All their discourse is of something to be enjoyed ...'

'Now for the reaction! Tell me of that.'

'I cannot; it's too dreadful. It's a general detestation of all things military, from the Horse Guards to the mess waiter ... If you have plenty of money, your soldier life is simply a barrier to the enjoyment of it. You are chained to one spot, to one set of asso-

12. *Ibid.*, vol. II, cap. lxxxix, pp. 401-02.

ciates, and to one mode of existence. If you're poor, it's fifty times worse, and all your time is spent in making five-and-sixpence a day equal to a guinea.¹³

When posted to India, Calvert, who has run into horrific debt, reneges upon the British Army, joins the forces of one of the dissident maharajas, and actually turns his artillery upon British troops. Surely the Victorian novel contains no more extreme indictment of the reactionary-turned-rebel and renegade. This strange and bleak story is a case-study in Lever's attitudes in his late fiction. What a distance we have travelled from the early military novels!

Despite the fact that he made his name as the creator of cheerful young subalterns, many of the junior officers in Lever's mature fiction adhere out of pure selfishness and bigotry to a social status-quo:

Frederick Travers was ... a young man self-willed and imperious, less ... from the unlimited license of his position, than from an hereditary feature which distinguished every member of his family, and made them as intolerant of restraint as they were wayward in purpose.¹⁴

Travers contrasts with Mark O'Donoghue; the one is spoiled by indulgent family wealth, pampered by social privilege and full of English arrogance; the other is ruined by parental ineptitude in a household of embarrassed means, struggling against a perceived indignity to his proper social status, and proud with a willful, self-destructive Nationalist paranoia.

Yet Lever is at pains to defend Mark O'Donoghue, rebel and malcontent though he may be. He has much more innate sympathy for the sulky, sometimes near brutish Mark than for the effete and cold-blooded Travers. He writes in the retrospective preface to the novel:

... judging from an Irish point of view, I do not consent to regard Mark O'Donoghue as a bad fellow. The greater number of his faults were the results of neglected training, irregular – almost utter want of – education, and the false position of an heir to a property so swamped by debt as to be valueless.¹⁵

When Mark is pressured to stay with his ageing father and not to go seeking his fortune – like but unlike Tom Burke – in the ranks of the French invaders, Lever is understanding:

To seek his fortune in some foreign service – to win an honourable name ... was the whole ambition of his life; and so engrossed was he in his own calculations, that he never deigned a thought of what his father might feel about it. The poverty that eats its

13. *A Rent in A Cloud*, cap. I, pp. 309-311, passim.

14. *The O'Donoghue*, cap. xiii, p. 138.

15. *Ibid.*, Preface, p. xvii.

way to the heart of families seldom fails to loosen the ties of domestic affection. The daily struggle, the hourly conflict with necessity too often destroy the delicate and trustful sense of protection ... The energies that should have expanded into homely affection and mutual regard, are spent in warding off a common enemy; and with weary minds and seared hearts the gentler charities of life have few sympathies.¹⁶

Between these two young men Lever places the figure of Travers' father Sir Marmaduke, thereby sharpening his contrast of rebels and reactionaries. Sir Marmaduke is an outsider trying to mediate between English and Irish worlds of reaction and revolution. Of course his vapid benevolence fails:

The state of Ireland had latterly become a topic in both countries. The poverty of the people – interpreted in various ways, and ascribed to very opposite causes – was a constant theme of discussion ... The strange phenomenon of a land teeming with abundance, yet overrun by a starving population had just begun to attract notice ... Sir Marmaduke was ... persuaded that his knowledge of the subject was perfect ... [and] ... he became actually impatient until he had reached the country, and commenced the great scheme of regeneration and civilization by which Ireland and her people were to be placed among the most favoured nations. He had heard much of Irish indolence and superstition, Irish bigotry and intolerance, the indifference to comfort, the indisposition to exertion, the recklessness to the present, the improvidence of the future; he had been told that saints days and holidays mulcted labour of more than half its due – that ignorance made the other half almost valueless; ... 'Why should these things be, when they were not so in Norfolk or in Yorkshire?' was the question he ever asked ... Sir Marmaduke had the very best of intentions – the weakest notions of their realization.¹⁷

Here are prejudices, innately reactionary, directly at war with the best intentions. Sir Marmaduke contrasts, as we shall see, with Lord Culduff in *The Bramleighs of Bishops Folly* (1868) who wants to 'improve' (by which he means exploit) Ireland exclusively for his own benefit.

No long-term relief for Irish problems will come from outside, argues Lever; the invading French forces in *The O'Donoghue* and again in *Maurice Tiernay*, are accompanied by Irish pseudo-'patriots.' Neither Wolf Tone nor Napper Tandy emerges with any credit from Lever's account of the invasion:

Religious rancour, party feuds, the hate of the Saxon – a blind, ill-directed, unthinking hate – were the motives that actuated (them). A terrible retribution for something upon somebody, an awful wiping out of old scores, a reversal of the lot of rich and poor, were the main incentives to (their) actions, and (they) were satisfied to stand by at the drawing of this great Lottery without even holding a ticket in it.¹⁸

16. *Ibid.*, cap. xii, p. 132.

17. *The O'Donoghue*, cap. iii, pp. 17-19, passim.

18. *Maurice Tiernay*, cap. xxiv, pp. 267-68.

Tiernay himself is French by birth, but has direct Irish ancestry. His reactionary father was executed during the Terror for supporting the deposed French monarch. As a child, Maurice witnesses, without criticism, gruesome scenes of execution. One night he even sleeps under the guillotine itself. The book traces the emotional vagaries of a character more riveting even than Burke or O'Donoghue.

Thus far I have mentioned only male characters. But it is a feature of Lever's growth as a novelist that his women become more sturdily independent, sometimes actively 'agin the government.' Several of Lever's younger women come close to a kind of social rebellion in the independence with which they treat the male-dominated world. Polly Dill in *Barrington* has a wonderful conversational vigour, as close to pertness as she could come without crossing the line; Caroline Dodd (*The Dodd Family Abroad*), stands head and shoulders above her disorganized family for common-sense – even though she has only been brought abroad as the only member of the family who understands irregular verbs! And Mary Martin represents female integrity and decency in *The Martins of Cro'Martin*. These three, and several other of Lever's young women are moving us towards the final point at which he creates Nina Kostalergi in his last novel, *Lord Kilgobbin*. Nina is an out-and-out rebel in her own right (and moreover with the most reactionary of all fathers) and, at the end of the novel, she elopes with and marries the escaped Fenian leader, Dan Donogan, to the amazement of everybody in the book – and I guess, the first-time reader too!

To Lever's studies of those whose reactionary tendencies are fostered by political disappointment – particularly the sense of betrayal they feel over the dissolution of the Irish parliament – we may add many of his legal and military characters. They will not let the world change, because its present condition suits their self-interested purposes. Characteristically, these ominous figures actually possess the real power and authority to hold their special and peculiar worlds in a state of suspended animation.

Most of Lever's English diplomats are despicable, corrupt and unfeeling exemplars of reaction. Lever doesn't present a flattering picture of the Service that paid his salary! The British Foreign Office is populated by chinless wonders and deeply vicious old *roués*, supported by incompetents who have entered the Service via nepotism. These portraits are the more telling since they clearly stem from the author's personal observations in his Consular capacity. In *The Bramleights of Bishop's Folly* (1868), Lord Culduff is remorseless in his pursuit of his own pleasure. When sent to negotiate the release of Jack Bramleigh from a Neapolitan prison he preens, flaunts, prevaricates and never goes anywhere near Naples. Culduff is a

chilling study of diplomatic reaction. Lever observes:

He was a man of very ordinary abilities, commonplace in every way, and yet he had contrived to impress the world with the notion of his capacity... He was not an imposter, for the simple reason that he believed in himself. He actually had negotiated his false coinage so long that he got to regard it as bullion ...¹⁹

Often, these elderly reactionaries are quiescent; they yearn merely to stave off the present and the future. But, despite his age and decrepitude, Culduff, starched and rouged every day before he deems himself fit to be seen, is grotesquely active. He is in Ireland to oversee the work in progress on his putative coalmines. He scuttles from place to place like an evil old crustacean. Grotesquely, he woos and weds the heiress Marian Bramleigh, despite an age disparity of something like forty years. Be it said, he meets his match in the bloodless and calculating Marian. Marian herself is one of Lever's most chilling and convincing female reactionaries, along with Lady Augusta – Colonel Bramleigh's estranged wife – and her Roman countess sister, Dora. The later Lever novels are full of these hard-bitten, cynical, self-interested females. They add a bitter undertow to the sophisticated social comedy at which Lever had become so adept in his later years.

Temple Bramleigh, middle son of the family around whom the novel centres, demonstrates that age is not a governing condition for reactionary tendencies. New to the diplomatic service, he seeks at every turn to model himself on his mentor, Culduff. Mean-spirited, disloyal, self-seeking, it is impossible to imagine this creature ever being of actual use to the Government in his chosen career.

The Bramleighs provides one of Lever's greatest comic achievements; the cheerful, extrovert, blissfully vulgar Cutbill, engineer extraordinary and man for all seasons. He functions as agent for some delightful social comedy as he exposes the remorseless and grim self-concern of the reactionaries.

Originally present as Culduff's adviser, by the end of the novel he is the *deus ex machina* of the congenial and innocent set. Don't miss Cutbill; he is wonderful. And he is important in the structure of ideas that underpin the novel. He mediates between the various social orders and the various emotional stances the main characters adopt. He is iconoclastic yet cautious; vulgar yet sympathetic. The polarization of types into rebel and reactionary is simply not recognized by the breezy man-of-the-people attitude Cutbill adopts. Nobody else in Lever's novels quite manages to achieve this position. Yet so mature is now Lever's art that, much as he enjoys cre-

19. *The Bramleighs of Bishop's Folly*, cap. x, p. 71.

ating Cutbill, and much as he clearly relishes the breath of fresh air this character brings to the story, yet the author never sentimentalizes him nor downplays the teeth-setting vulgarity he can display. Only a very practiced and very accomplished writer could have achieved this.

In *Lord Kilgobbin*, it takes the creation of eight separate young people, each of them having a major bearing upon the novel's structure and meaning, for Lever to manage all he wants to say about rebellion and reaction. They represent extremes from Donogan the escaped Fenian revolutionary to Lockwood the starchy and reactionary English soldier. Donogan is by no means the conventional Fenian outcast; he is sensitive, gifted, passionate. He is a gentleman who has given his entire fortune to 'the cause'. By contrast the self-centred English visitors Lockwood and Walpole are seriously uncongenial. Mat Kearney's niece, Nina Kostalergi, who is staying with the Kearneys, is probably Lever's most interesting young female. She is forthright and abrasive, yet her dynamism offers a strong corrective to the enervation of the Kearney *ménage*. A natural rebel, Nina is downright unsympathetic at times, yet she ends the novel married to Donogan whose evasion of the police she has assisted. The reader is torn between the reactions of 'Well they richly deserve each other', and 'good luck to them both'. In how many other Victorian novels does the major love-interest make us so nearly sympathetic to forces totally at odds with the political norm?

At first sight Lord Kilgobbin himself, appears a typical Lever reactionary. Kearney's title is claimed in the dubious conviction that James II ennobled his ancestor whilst fleeing after the Battle of the Boyne. The irony of this rather ludicrous ennoblement suffuses the entire novel. Old Mat is stuck in the middle of the dreary Bog of Allen in a mock-castle-cum-farmhouse that is falling about his ears. Surely this is simply *The O'Donoghue* revisited? Not so. Lever's development as an artist shows clearly in the skill with which he plays subtle variations on the rebel/reactionary theme within the one character. Set in his ways, regressive and socially ridiculous, Kearney yet has charisma and acumen. When roused by the English reactionaries who come a-visiting his 'castle', he can sound positively revolutionary:

'Of all the things we despise in Ireland, take my word for it, there is nothing we think so little of as a weak Government. We can stand up strong and bold against hard usage, and we gain self-respect by resistance; but when you come down to conciliations and what you call healing measures, we feel as if you were going to humbug us, and there is not a devilment comes into our heads we would not do, just to see how you'll bear it ... Who has broke down the laws of Ireland but ... [you English]? ... You won't give us our independence, and so we'll fight for it; and though, maybe, we

can't lick you, we'll make your life so uncomfortable to you, keeping us down, that you'll beg a compromise – a healing measure, you'll call it – just as when I won't give Tim Sullivan a lease, he takes a shot at me; and as I reckon the holes in my hat, I think better of it, and take a pound or two off his rent.'

'I can make nothing of Ireland or Irishmen either.'

'Why would you? God help us! We are poor enough and wretched enough; but we're not come down to that yet that a major of Dragoons can read us like big print.'

'So far as I see you wish for a strong despotism.'

'In one way it would suit us very well. Do you see, major, what a weak administration and uncertain laws do? They set every man in Ireland about righting himself by his own hand. If I know I shall be starved when I am turned out of my holding, I'm not at all so sure I'll be hanged if I shoot my landlord. Make me as certain of the one as the other, and I'll not shoot him.'²⁰

The borders between revolution and reaction have evaporated. Lever, maybe, perceives a case for the first time in which his own creative tensions may be reconciled. His heart always had a yen for extreme independence; his head had led him to pragmatic and sometimes deeply compromised reactions with his sense of identity as creator, as Irishman, as man of the world, as spokesman of the middle way, as comedian with a troubled conscience. In the character of Lord Kilgobbin the novelist at last comes to a successful mediation between the forces ranged on either side – bloody anarchy versus bloodless cynicism. Only a full reading can demonstrate how ingeniously and how dexterously Lever creates and uses these contrasting figures. *Lord Kilgobbin* is a worthy and a moving conclusion to Lever's long career as a novelist, and makes a fitting point of conclusion to my survey of his rebels and reactionaries.

20. *Lord Kilgobbin*, cap. lxxv, pp. 507-8.

PART II

ESSAYS

CEDRIC WATTS

THE POWER AND THE GLORY: PARADOXES AND PLEASURES

This essay has four parts, entitled respectively 'Preamble', 'Paradoxes', 'Pleasures of the Text', and 'Comedy'.¹ The argument of the whole is that Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory* is, on large and small scales, more paradoxical in content and therefore more durable than might once have been thought. One emerging paradox of its reception is that, these days, this reputedly Catholic novel may appeal to the sceptic as much, or almost as much, as to the Christian.

1: Preamble. Recently, having agreed to lecture on *The Power and the Glory* at the annual Graham Greene Festival at Berkhamsted, I re-read the novel in some trepidation. David Lodge once suggested that it does not sustain re-reading.² I had long regarded it as Greene's most brilliant novel; and various critics treat it as the best of Greene's fictional works. *The Power and the Glory* was first published in 1940, and won the Hawthornden Prize. When I re-read it, the reason for my trepidation was obvious. I thought: surely, by now, it will seem dated. The prose will seem old-fashioned. The issues will have dated. The Roman Catholic Church today is not the Church that Greene knew in the 1930s. Many of today's British students take for granted a secular materialistic outlook. The conflict of Marxism with Catholicism, which so preoccupied Greene, has dwindled. Today, it is not Marxism which looms ominously on the political horizon. It is Islamism.

So I re-read *The Power and the Glory*; and, to my relief, it seemed better than ever. I saw subtleties that I had missed at previous readings. This novel is concise, vivid, elegantly structured, sharply intelligent, thematically rich, philosophically and theologically searching, and emotionally moving. It is a 'chase novel', a page-turning suspense thriller, and it is also a thought-provoking study of persecution. The prose is still fresh, clear, surprising, distinctive and engaging, with no fat or vapidty. The intelligence is often heterodox, seeking to challenge conventional attitudes. Ironies interlace the work. And its paradoxes, large, medium and small, operate

1. This essay sometimes draws on parts of my book *A Preface to Greene* (Harlow: Longman, 1997), but revises and augments the material.

2. D. Lodge, *Graham Greene* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 27.

through the mind and the senses.

2: The Paradoxes of *THE POWER AND THE GLORY*. A paradox is an apparent contradiction which yields a truth or part-truth; it resembles a discord resolvable as harmony. Here is a *little* paradox. The main character is called 'the whisky priest'. He calls himself that; others call him that; and it's what the academic commentators call him. 'The whisky priest.' And now, you may already have noticed what is odd about that term. Throughout the novel, he never touches a drop of whisky. Oh yes, he drinks brandy, wine and beer, and more brandy. But not whisky. There is a mismatch. It seems deliberate. If so, why? Probably because it provides a little clue to what happens extensively in the novel. Repeatedly there is a mismatch between seeming and being, between label and reality. For instance: the jacket of a romantic novel conceals the priest's Latin breviary. But the romantic novel is called *La Eterna Mártir: The Eternal Martyr*: so the mismatch indicates a truth: martyrdom continues. Again: the drunken priest baptises a boy with a girl's name, Brigitta: a mismatch; but a man comments: 'It's a good saint's name': it still does a Christian job. But why 'Brigitta'? Much later, we learn that it's because the priest was thinking of his daughter, and that is *her* name. Of course, the *biggest* paradox in this series is that while the central character, that anonymous priest, increasingly regards himself as a great mismatch (a religious failure), we increasingly realise that he is a saint in the making.

His grounds for seeing himself as a failure are obvious. He is a semi-alcoholic; he has known despair; he has fathered an illegitimate child, and he finds that his love for the child prevents him from being properly penitent for his sexual sin. He recalls that once, when he led a comfortable life, he was proud and complacent. He then stays on in a dangerous region of Mexico (a Mexican state in which religion is forbidden and priests may be shot), so that he can minister to the ordinary people. Surely that entails moral courage; but the priest himself denies it. Near the end, he says this: 'It would have been much better, I think, if I had gone [...].' (By 'gone', he means 'fled from the region'.) He continues:

'Because pride was at work all the time. Not love of God [...]. Pride's the worst thing of all. I thought I was a fine fellow to have stayed when the others had gone. And then I thought I was so grand I could make my own rules. I gave up fasting, daily Mass. I neglected my prayers – and one day because I was drunk and lonely – well, you know how it was, I got a child. It was all pride. Just pride because I'd stayed [...]. I'd got so that I didn't have a hundred communicants a month. If I'd gone I'd have given God to twelve times that number.' (196)³

3. All quotations from *The Power and the Glory* are from the Penguin edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962; rpt., 1970).

And when the Marxist lieutenant says: 'Well, you're going to be a martyr', the priest replies, 'Oh no. Martyrs are not like me. They don't think all the time – if I had drunk more brandy I shouldn't be so afraid.' So our priest is apparently condemned out of his own mouth. On the morning of his execution he feels 'only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all'. He had expected, and still expects, damnation for himself. Indeed, like such later Greenian protagonists as Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*, Sarah in *The End of the Affair*, and Father Callifer in *The Potting Shed*, he tries to make a substitutive bargain with God. His bargain involves his illegitimate child, who is depicted as having fallen from innocence into tainting experience. He says: 'O God, help her. Damn me, I deserve it, but let her live for ever.' Nevertheless, as he prepares for death, he reflects that he has been so useless that perhaps he is not even 'Hell-worthy'. As we know, Greene was potentially influenced by T. S. Eliot's notorious essay on Baudelaire, which declares: 'The worst that can be said of most of our malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned. Baudelaire was man enough for damnation.'⁴ So *one* half of the paradox of the whisky priest is that he is a disgrace to the church, a semi-alcoholic with an illegitimate child; a man who, if he is to be believed, has been motivated largely by pride and is a complete failure. He doesn't even look like a hero: he is small, with sloping shoulders and yellow decaying teeth. He leaves a trail of death: four hostages have been slain because they would not betray him.

The *other* half of the paradox is that he is clearly a saint in the making. The more he rebukes himself for pride, the more we are aware of his humility. He is constantly criticising himself and attempting to see the best in others. By remaining, at the risk of his life, he has not only administered the Mass to the faithful, he has set an influential and salutary example. He thinks he is useless; but we see that numerous people have had their lives touched by his life. After his execution, a pious mother speculates that he may become a saint, and she mentions that, already, precious relics, pieces of a bloodstained handkerchief, are being sold. The theme of the priest's influence is extensive; indeed, *The Power and the Glory* has an extensive covert plot on this theme.

A useful technical term coined by Ian Watt is 'delayed decoding'.⁵ Delayed decoding occurs when a writer gives first an *effect* and secondly, but

4. T.S. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 429. Greene quotes this passage with approval in his essay 'Henry James: The Religious Aspect', *Collected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 41.

5. Ian Watt discusses 'delayed decoding' in his *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), pp. 175-79, 270-71.

only after a marked delay, the *cause* of that effect. *The Power and the Glory* abounds in delayed decoding. For instance, in paragraph two Mr Tench passes 'the Treasury, which had once been a church': pages elapse before we understand why a Treasury has replaced a church, and recognise the irony that an atheistic régime has put the money-changers back into the temple. Another example, given just now, was the delay before we learn why the priest uttered the name 'Brigitta'. When delayed decoding is used on a large scale, it may become covert plotting. A covert plot is one which, at a first reading of a literary work, is not seen by the reader as a coherent sequence. The reader sees elements of it, but not the entirety. Only at a second or subsequent reading is the plot-sequence likely to emerge as a clear, co-ordinated entity.⁶ A second reading of *The Power and the Glory* reveals that numerous seemingly disparate elements of the plot are co-ordinated by the changes for the better effected by the priest's presence. Mr Tench, the boy Luis, Coral Fellows, some of the villagers, the woman in jail, and even the Marxist lieutenant: all have apparently been touched by grace.

Tench, the dentist, after meeting the priest, is moved to write to his wife in England to try to re-establish their relationship. He may not succeed (for she has fallen into bad ideological company), but at least he has made the effort. The novel's treatment of the boy Luis is more extensive. The realism of Greene's narrative is made the more persuasive by its lengthy contrastive quotations from a supposed work of Catholic propaganda and hagiography. A Catholic mother reads to her children the story of a recent martyr, Father Juan, who defied the atheistic law by ministering to the people but was arrested and shot. The story stresses *ad nauseam* the supposed virtues, the sweet saintly nature, of this priest. Understandably, the boy Luis shows signs of rebellion against this indoctrination: he expresses boredom and scepticism. For him, a more convincing hero is the local Marxist lieutenant: he is delighted to be allowed to touch the officer's revolver, and the lieutenant feels proud that he is winning young followers for the atheistic cause. But, after meeting the whisky-priest, and after hearing of his execution, Luis turns in resentment against the officer, and spits on his revolver-butt. In contrast, as the novel ends, the boy kisses the hand of a new priest who clandestinely arrives to take the place of the martyr. We do not hear the new priest's name: it is the continuity of the sacred office that counts. Just before the knock at the door from the newcomer, Luis had dreamt that the dead whisky-priest 'winked at him – an unmistakable flicker of the eyelid, just like that', so that we may detect a sign of

6. See Cedric Watts, *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984).

complicity, a hint of resurrection, a glint of victory for the faith. Greene was considerably influenced by J. W. Dunne, who had accumulated evidence to demonstrate that dreams could be truly premonitory, a theory related to the orthodox Christian belief that all time is simultaneously present in the mind of God or, as Dunne called Him, the 'Master-mind'. (Greene's most modernistic tale, 'The Bear Fell Free', is exuberantly Dunnian, chronologically layered like an onion).⁷

The whisky-priest returns from safety to danger, knowingly entering an ambush, in order to administer the last rites to Calver, the dying gangster. Calver is aware that he is being used as bait, and in his dying moments he tries to help the priest by offering him a knife. The priest prays for him, saying 'O merciful God, after all he was thinking of me'; and though the prayer is 'without conviction', a kind of altruism was indeed there in the gangster's action. One great irony of the situation is that Calver's victims, we gradually realise, include Coral Fellows, who had previously sheltered the priest. In addition to the large-scale covert plot concerning the priest's transformative power, there is a briefer covert plot concerning Coral's death. That death is never directly described. Once again, we experience markedly delayed decoding which becomes a short sequence of covert plotting. When the fugitive priest had revisited the Fellows' homestead, he had found it deserted except for a broken-backed starving dog: some disaster has befallen the place. Near the end of the novel, we find that Coral's parents are returning to England. They try not to talk about her death, but the topic obtrudes, and chance references enable us to infer what has happened. The references include the phrase 'that scoundrel', and the mutual recriminations of the couple. Slowly, we work out that what happened was this: When Captain Fellows was away from the homestead, Calver had arrived there. Mrs Fellows, a depressive hypochondriac, always fearful of death, fled from the intruder. Coral, always brave and responsible, tried to drive Calver away. We know that long previously, she had warded off the lieutenant, threatening to set the dog on him; but on this occasion, it appears, the intruder maimed the dog and shot Coral. It may seem strange that such dramatic material is not presented directly by Greene but is left to be inferred by us. One explanation is that Greene admired Joseph Conrad, who liked oblique techniques. For instance: in Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent*, the violent death of the innocent boy, Stevie, is not presented directly, but gradually has to be inferred by us. Conrad once remarked:

7. J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927) and *The Serial Universe* (1934) influenced various writers, including J. B. Priestley, John Buchan, and T. S. Eliot. 'I am convinced that Dunne was right', remarked Greene. See Watts, *A Preface to Greene*, pp. 128-36.

'One writes only half the book; the other half is with the reader.'⁸ But there is a better explanation. By leaving plot-gaps which we subsequently fill by inference, Greene attunes us to the notion of a God who moves in mysterious ways. Indeed, he uses the paradox which T.S. Eliot used in *The Waste Land*: an apparent absence of God may simply be a test of our ability to recognise His presence, by intelligence or faith.

In *The Power and the Glory*, Coral's parents appear to have no religious belief; and Coral herself had said that she lost her faith 'at the age of ten'. She, however, had met both the lieutenant and the priest, and had sided with the priest, taking him food and drink, and resenting his persecution. She teaches him a bit of the Morse code, as a means of communication, and actually chooses two longs and a short: the Morse for G: perhaps it stands for God. Her parents later remark that 'she went on afterwards – as if he'd told her things'. One implication is that the priest may have restored Coral's faith. The confirmation of this, in Greenian terms, is provided in the following way. After her death, and on the eve of his execution, the priest has a strange dream. In a cathedral, he feels detached from the Mass until Coral appears and fills his glass with wine. She says, 'I got it from my father's room'. The cleric and congregation then tap a message in Morse code. Three longs and a short. To us and to *Webster's Dictionary* it may be merely a coded exclamation-mark;⁹ but Coral decodes it as the word 'News'. And it's evidently good news: the priest wakes with, we are told, 'a huge feeling of hope'. Well, we may say, 'It's only a dream'; but it hints that Coral, after death, has become an intermediary who can offer the priest a glimpse of his salvation to come. Perhaps, like Beatrice with Dante, she may guide the pilgrim heavenwards.

One of Greene's later tales is called 'The Last Word'. It describes a future era in which atheistic totalitarianism has prevailed and the last Pope is kept alive only as a figure of scorn. Eventually, he is taken before the arch-dictator, a general, and shot. Yet, even as the trigger is pulled, the general reflects, 'Is it possible that what this man believed may be true?', and we realise that the message of faith has, after all, been transmitted to posterity. In *The Power and the Glory*, Greene has established an elegant contrast and contest between the whisky priest and the atheistic lieutenant. Both are idealists; both work hard for their ideals; and both are concerned about the poor and the children. And both are ideologically opposed. The lieu-

8. *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunningham Graham*, edited by C.T. Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 46.

9. *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language* (Naples, Florida: Trident Press International, 1996), p. 828.

tenant is in some ways priest-like. We are told this:

There was something of a priest in his intent observant walk – a theologian going back over the errors of the past to destroy them again.

He reached his own lodging [...]. In the light of a candle it looked as comfortless as a prison or a monastic cell [...].

He was a mystic, too, and what he had experienced was vacancy – a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all. He knew. (24-5)

During the meetings between the lieutenant and the priest, some fellow-feeling is established. Eventually, experiencing sympathy with and respect for the priest, the lieutenant seeks (illegally and unavailingly) to fetch a confessor for him. Here the cowardice of Padre José, the married ex-priest, contrasts tellingly with the courage of the whisky priest. (Mutually-illuminating contrasts: that's one of the secrets of the book's vividness.) Next, the lieutenant brings our priest, again illegally, a bottle of brandy. 'You're a good man,' the priest had told him earlier. 'You aren't a bad fellow', the lieutenant tells him now. After the execution, the officer finds that (in Greene's acerbically paradoxical phrasing) 'the dynamic love which used to move his trigger-finger felt flat and dead'. Perhaps that atheistic commitment will return; but perhaps, like the general in 'The Last Word', the lieutenant has been inflected towards religious belief.

And numerous other people, whom the priest has met or helped, have possibly been strengthened in their faith or nudged towards the faith because of him: notably the fellow-sufferers in the stinking jail, and the people of his home village. A proud woman in the prison rebukes him for bringing the Church into disrepute, but later, in a charitable lie, intervenes to save him from being recognised by the lieutenant. Again, his sly daughter, termed a 'little devil', temporarily saves him. She identifies him to the lieutenant as her father; and the lieutenant is thereby persuaded that the fellow must really be a peasant and not a priest. Furthermore, even the treacherous Judas-figure grudgingly observes, 'You may be a saint for all I know', and seeks the whisky-priest's blessing. The priest's execution takes place not in the customary public place, a cemetery, but in a private yard. The reason given is that otherwise 'There might have been a demonstration', a popular protest against the authorities.

Thus, the narrative in which a representative of the Church is apparently defeated is one of covert victory for the faith. Abandonment has not, after all, been total. When in Mexico, in Orizaba, Greene felt that 'it was like Galilee between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection'. He says this in the travel-book called *The Lawless Roads*. According to the Bible, after Christ's crucifixion the disciples felt abandoned on the journey to Emmaus, but

Christ was present and accompanied them unrecognised. At the outset of *The Power and the Glory*, abandonment is repeatedly stressed: there is a symphonic orchestration of the theme. Tench experiences 'the huge abandonment'. The priest feels that 'he was abandoned'. The church has been abolished by the state; and Luis's father says 'We have been abandoned here'. Greene, in his travels through those regions of Mexico where the Catholic Church had been prohibited, had experienced a sense of nightmarish vacancy, and he recalled Cardinal Newman's sombre words about the 'aboriginal calamity' of a human race 'discarded' from God's presence.¹⁰ As *The Power and the Glory* unfolds, however, and as irony dovetails with irony, plot-detail with plot-detail, so the overt and covert plotting of the narrative imply a covert plot in the world: which is, that the apparent defeat of faith is merely a test for the faithful and the ground of new victories for divine grace. To put it another way: in the novel *The Power and the Glory*, the emerging paradox of the title-phrase from the Lord's Prayer is this: the *power* of God is manifested in apparent weakness and defeat, while the *glory* of God is manifested through the base, mundane and sordid.

But that last sentence is not quite right, because it makes the novel sound too much like Christian propaganda. We need to go further.

3: The Pleasures of the Text. The large sales of *The Power and the Glory*, the high critical praise accorded it, and (in the experience of teachers) the responses of students from a wide variety of religious and irreligious backgrounds, show that the novel has a remarkably wide appeal. It seems to be enjoyed almost as much by sceptics as by believers.

One reason for this is that Greene boldly pre-empts the sceptic. He lets the lieutenant and other characters voice familiar hostile arguments. One such argument is that priests line their own pockets while promising pie in the sky to the poor. The lieutenant uses that one. The priest is sheltered by Mr Lehr, who criticises his Church from a Lutheran standpoint: Roman Catholic churches value luxury, he says, while the people starve. Some Catholics (Luis's mother, and that proud woman in jail, and Maria) criticise the priest for being a disgrace to the faith. He himself is his own severest critic, noting his own pride, lust, and cowardice. He also comments bitterly on the prosperous, complacent levels of the Church's hierarchy: he has known them at first hand. So readers' scepticism is pre-empted and incorporated. Furthermore, the priest attracts left-wing sympathy. He moves amongst the poorest of the poor, sharing their squalor and wretchedness. Stinking, con-

10. Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* is quoted as an epigraph to *The Lawless Roads* (London: Longman, Green, 1939).

fused and weary, he makes a credibly flawed and sympathetic victim.

Numerous atheistic readers can suspend disbelief in religious premises when reading and enjoying religious poetry by, for example, John Donne or John Milton or Gerard Manley Hopkins. Similarly, such readers may suspend disbelief when reading *The Power and the Glory*. They may choose temporarily to imagine that among the characterisations, God is as real as is the priest. Even if they can not, the novel may still be powerfully effective. It may seem to describe eloquently the folly of human beings who are seduced into intolerance, pain and bloodshed by inflexible ideologies which sacrifice the pulsing present on the altar of an illusory future.

But that again may make it sound too moralistic. The value of a good literary work lies less in any paraphrasable message than in the richness of the imaginative experience that the work offers. To engage us with that experience, suspense is necessary. A student once said to me: 'This novel is a good page-turner, isn't it?' Obviously, he meant that it gripped him and made him read on to discover the outcome. One secret of a good page-turner is this. Early in the reading, we formulate some big question which engages our mind and emotions and which seems to have at least two opposed answers. As we proceed through the work, we inspect the increasing evidence to see which of the answers may prevail. The more evenly balanced the evidence, for and against, the greater is our suspense. The authorial trick is to keep the scales in motion but not clattering down on one side or the other. In the case of *The Power and the Glory*, we are soon engaged by this question: Will the priest elude pursuit, or will he be caught and killed? Evidence to *support* the notion that he will escape is ample. He is intelligent, kind and resourceful, and we like him. But the evidence *against* his escape is also ample. He is absent-minded, he is isolated; and his pursuers are numerous and are driven by the lieutenant, who himself is intelligent and resourceful. What's more, the terrain is often hostile, and the priest's sense of duty imperils him. So there is *one* big suspense-principle. But Greene loves paradoxes. So he gives another, and conflicting, suspense-principle. Now the big question is this: Will the priest evade his religious destiny or fulfil it? Evidence that he will evade it includes the fact that he is so resourceful: he could indeed manage to cross the border into safety; and he does so. In contrast, evidence that he will fulfil it includes the fact that he repeatedly jeopardises his own safety by trying to minister to those who request or need him. At the beginning, he literally misses the boat to safety because a woman requests his priestly ministration. At the end, he metaphorically misses the boat to safety because, although he has crossed the border, he responds to the request to attend the dying gangster. So Greene has mastered a double suspense principle in which the theological plays against the secular. Our secular imagination

wants the priest to escape. Our theological imagination wants the priest to fulfil his destiny: which is not to escape but to be a martyr and eventually a saint. I suspect that many an atheistic or agnostic reader has been seduced not only into imagining that the most important character in this novel is, after all, God rather than the priest, but also into estimating how God's intentions are being fulfilled as the events unfold.

Another reason for the appeal of *The Power and the Glory* is that, although the territory traversed is a familiar Greenland, it is now a Greenland within which there is scope for sympathy, compassion and even joy. Since his hero must express the Christian virtues of love, charity, and compassion, Greene is obliged to mitigate his own former sombre harshness. In such previous novels as *Stamboul Train* and *Brighton Rock*, and even in the non-fictional *Lawless Roads*, that harshness came all too easily to Greene's depressive imagination. In *The Power and the Glory*, Greene moves towards a more humane balance. If the priest's daughter seems tainted, young Coral exudes hope. 'Hate was just a failure of imagination', reflects the priest. This novel works hard to encourage an extension of the sympathetic imagination. The wretchedness of the villagers in the forest; the squalor of the prisoners in the jail; the mourning of the Indian woman with her slain child; even animals such as the burdened donkey and the maimed dog: all these are evoked by an eye which does not glare with fascinated disgust, but rather seeks to observe, discriminate and understand. As it does so, it craftily plays a gamut of theological and political feelings in the reader. Right wing, liberal, and left-wing feelings are mingled: the traditional Catholic faith is made to seem relevant to the present, and is linked to the sympathetic observation of the poor and the oppressed. There Greene anticipates 'Liberation Theology' by about thirty years.

Another feature of the novel which may be under-estimated is the nature of its realism. *The Power and the Glory* is very evocative, and the descriptions of people and places have strange vividness. In a novel, realistic descriptions can be tedious if they report what we already know or assume to be the case. On the other hand, realistic descriptions can be persuasive and engaging if they offer information to the side of the obvious, if they surprise us into awareness of a situation, or if they seem to be looking at the situation from an unexpected angle. Repeatedly in *The Power and the Glory*, Greene provides this oblique and surprising quality. Here are just three examples. On his journey, the priest reflects: 'One of the oddest things about the world these days was that there were no clocks – you could go a year without hearing one strike.' And we learn that that's because the clocks were on the churches, which have been demolished. Second example: when the *jefe*, the Chief of Police, is playing billiards, the

score is recorded not on a board but by means of rings strung on a cord across the room; and when the chief's game is briefly interrupted by the lieutenant, we are told that 'somebody raised a cue and surreptitiously pushed back one of the jefe's rings'. The little detail of cheating gives utter plausibility to that unexpected method of keeping score, and in turn to the locality and its denizens. Third example: this is how the novel describes the priest's entry into the yard where he is to be shot:

A small man came out of a side door: he was held up by two policemen, but you could tell that he was doing his best – it was only that his legs were not fully under his control. They paddled him across to the opposite wall [...]. (216)

The reflective priest whom we know well is suddenly seen in a coolly objectifying perspective as 'A small man'. You can tell he's 'doing his best', presumably because he holds his head up and looks determined; but of course his legs are not fully under his control: when we are in a state of terror, our knees go wobbly. And that word 'paddled' in 'They paddled him across' is unexpected but precise: if you paddle a canoe, there is an alternating pressure on first one side and then the other, and a slightly zigzagging course; so that word 'paddled' fits surprisingly well the motion of someone who is being swung along between two other people.

Another open secret of the book's descriptive vividness is the abundance of 'leopards'. In the autobiographical volume *A Sort of Life*, Greene says that he used to be all too fond of 'leopards', that being his term for similes which are unusual, so unusual that they sometimes leap out at you.¹¹ Like the 'conceits' of English metaphysical poetry, some may be remarkable by their oddity rather than by their aptness. They often have a quality of paradox because they link the abstract with the concrete, or *vice versa*. Two quite famous examples are: 'He drank the brandy down like damnation'; and 'She carried her responsibilities carefully like crockery across the hot yard'. The former may seem rather melodramatic and parody-inviting, but its context is the priest's reflections on how easy it is to relapse into complacency. The latter is fine: carrying responsibilities 'like crockery' evokes succinctly young Coral's earnest concern to discharge her duties well; we think of someone carrying a heavy load of fragile china. But there are hundreds of kindred similes in the novel; and some are very striking. For instance, when Mrs Fellows gives her husband a rapid frightened smile, we are told, 'It was like a trick you do with a blackboard. Draw a dog in one line without lifting the chalk – and the answer, of course, is a sausage'. The simile, recalling that 'dog' is a colloquial term for 'sausage',

11. G. Greene, *A Sort of Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 138.

is an ingenious way of suggesting a response which is rapid and proficient, but deceptive and disappointing. Then, we are told this of the priest: 'His conscience began automatically to work: it was like a slot machine into which any coin could be fitted, even a cheater's blank disk.' So, even a fraudulent appeal evokes the priest's habitual charity; even virtue may seem mechanical. Another strikingly complex example is this one: 'an oil-gusher [...] was like the religious sense in man, cracking suddenly upwards, a black pillar of fumes and impurity, running to waste'. That one seems peculiarly negative, but it is prompted by the priest's encounter with the Judas-figure, who feverishly seeks to confess his sins: he gushes.

Greene said that he became embarrassed by his leopards, and sought to eliminate them from his later prose. Indeed, his prose did in later years become more transparent and less stylised. Frankly, I think that's a pity. These striking similes of his repeatedly surprise us into fresh linkages and reflections. And in *The Power and the Glory*, they connect well with another engaging feature, which is this: the priest's reflections are often intelligently paradoxical too. You could derive an anthology of Greene's subversive 'wit and wisdom' from this novel alone. Consider these three instances. 'Man was so limited: he hadn't even the ingenuity to invent a new vice'. 'It was too easy to die for what was good or beautiful.....; it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt'. 'God might forgive cowardice and passion, but was it possible to forgive the habit of piety?'. In each case, a radical thesis is compressed into an aphorism which aspires to the condition of paradox. At one point in the novel, the priest reflects that if the Judas-figure betrays him for seven hundred pesos, this, far from damning the Judas figure, might actually save him:

[A] year without anxiety might save this man's soul. You only had to turn up the underside of any situation and out came scuttling these small absurd contradictory situations. He had given way to despair – and out of that had emerged a human soul and love – not the best love, but love all the same. (100)

Fiercely intelligent reflections, laced with the paradoxical and perhaps even with the saintly. The lack of anxiety might save the Judas figure from vice and damnation; and the priest links that man's situation to his own, for he had found that the sin of despair led to the sin of fornication, and thereby engendered new life (his daughter's life), and thus engendered love. And a typical bold linkage of abstract and concrete lurks in that metaphorical phrasing: 'You only had to turn up the underside of any situation and out came scuttling these small absurd contradictory situations': the metaphor links paradoxical reflections with the familiar experience of turning over a stone in the garden and finding earwigs and woodlice hur-

rying out. T. S. Eliot once remarked that to John Donne, the metaphysical poet, 'a thought... was an experience; it modified his sensibility'.¹² In *The Power and the Glory*, the descriptions of localities are of course richly sensuous: you may recall the 'sour green smell [...] from the river', the snake that 'hissed away into the grass like a match-flame', and the stench from the 'full and very heavy pail' in the prison-cell. But Eliot's point about Donne seems to apply particularly well to Greene: because you find that in *The Power and the Glory*, original thinking is repeatedly given a sensuous familiarity, and familiar thinking is given originality by the vividness of expression. For instance: 'Why should anyone listen to *his* prayers? [...] He could feel his prayers weigh him down like undigested food.' In those three words 'like undigested food', you find shock-tactics, paradox, a familiar notion and unexpected precision. Sometimes, when reading such prose, you may recall Virginia Woolf's suggestion that the meaning of life is a matter not of 'the great revelation' but of local illuminations: just 'matches struck unexpectedly in the dark'.¹³

4: Comedy. One of the features which give a paradoxical quality to *The Power and the Glory* is this. Although the main plot obviously has grim, sombre, painful and tragic aspects, the narrative invokes various comic modes. The work as a whole is richly ironic, and sometimes the ironies yield a dry or dark form of comedy.

When the priest, utterly weary, arrives one night at a village, he simply wishes to sleep, but an old man infuriatingly insists that the villagers are eager to confess their sins to him now. The priest reluctantly agrees to hear them, but weeps in exhaustion and anger. The old man then wakes up the sleeping villagers, and, though they wail that they are weary and only wish to sleep, he insists that they must now confess to the priest – who is clearly 'very holy', for he is 'weeping for our sins'. The exhausted people reluctantly confess to an exhausted reluctant confessor. A large instance of darkly ironic comedy is the priest's attempt to buy wine for communion. Beer is permitted by the state, but other alcoholic drinks are not, and in any case the priest is a fugitive, so his position is doubly risky. He negotiates with a beggar, who in turn negotiates with the governor's cousin. Eventually, after tough haggling, the cousin sells the priest a bottle of brandy and a bottle of wine. The priest courteously offers the vendor a glass of brandy; but of course the cousin takes a glass of wine, while the priest and the beggar drink brandy. Then the cousin decides to have a second and a third glass,

12. T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', *Selected Essays* (London: Longman, Green, 1939), p. 287.

13. V. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964; rpt., 1970), p. 183.

while the priest watches in dismay. Next, the Chief of Police arrives, and has a glass of wine, takes the bottle, and proceeds to reminisce. And what does he reminisce about? Of all things, his first communion, and the thrill his soul experienced at the time, and the fact that later he was dutifully obliged to shoot the priest who had officiated. Then our priest begs to be allowed to take the remaining wine away; but the Chief of Police empties the bottle, and is then puzzled to see the priest weeping. It's a scene of drunken comedy given a bitter edge as we see the wine intended for communion gratifying the priest-killer, the Chief of Police. The novel also, however, provides a running joke about the Chief's tooth-ache, and that has its culmination when our whisky-priest dies. The Chief, in the dentist's chair, is left moaning in pain, because Tench the dentist is distracted from dealing with his tooth; and he is distracted by his reflections about the priest who has just been shot. It's a kind of revenge. Numerous scenes in the novel have this black-comic or mordantly ironic edge.

But a more important mode of comedy emerges. Long ago, in the 4th century BC, Plato's *Symposium* had described a banquet at which Socrates was engaged in debate. At its close, Socrates claims that a great writer could be a creator of both tragedy and comedy. But the hearers fall into drunken sleep, so Socrates goes home, and we never learn his full argument. The proof of his claim is provided, however, by Greene's *The Power and the Glory*. In a profound sense, this novel is both tragic and comic. The whisky priest dies young: a good man is destroyed early. Readers may experience that eloquently-depicted waste which is a characteristic of great tragedies. Nevertheless, the priest has died for a continuing cause. Readers may imagine him as a martyr and potential saint; one whose sufferings gain heavenly reward. If you are a believer, you may think that Greene has created the following big paradox: *The Power and the Glory* reconciles human tragedy with what Dante originally termed simply *La commedia* – the Divine Comedy. If, however, you are a sceptic, you may find another big paradox: *The Power and the Glory* depicts the human readiness to live, kill, and die for ideological illusions: a perennial tragicomedy. As Joseph Conrad pointed out, even the person who says 'I have no illusions' has retained at least that illusion.¹⁴ And, as Graham Greene reminds us, while the living close the eyes of the dead, the dead open the eyes of the living – as his words still do. While the dead priest is commemorated by the holy relic of a bloodstained handkerchief, Graham Greene lives in the vivid pages of *The Power and the Glory*. And we, the faithful and faithless alike, can experience that mundane but sustaining miracle.

14. J. Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), p. 175.

CHIARA SERANI

DA OEDIPUS AD ALCESTIS: EVOLUZIONE DELL'ANTIEROE
HUGHESIANO NEGLI ADATTAMENTI
DA SENECA ED EURIPIDE

Oggetto finora di scarsa attenzione critica, le traduzioni e gli adattamenti di Ted Hughes da testi della tradizione classica e moderna si rivelano invece ricchi di spunti analitici.¹ Non solo relativamente alle scelte stilistiche e lessicali attraverso le quali il poeta va a personalizzare e rinnovare gli originali, infondendovi, sia detto in breve, l'armamentario linguistico tipico del suo idioletto più viscerale e sanguigno, ma anche, e soprattutto, in merito al suo appropriarsi delle *fabulae* di riferimento piegandole alla propria visione. Ciò, non di rado, grazie a interventi e interpolazioni che, in parte, ne risemantizzano i contenuti e da cui riverberano notevoli occasioni di riflessione rispetto allo stesso macrotesto hughesiano e al suo evolvere. In particolare, se il primo esperimento del genere, quello di *Seneca's Oedipus* (1969), appartiene a pieno titolo al contesto dell'intensa stagione mitopoietica dei tardi anni Sessanta e del decennio successivo, di cui anticipa e chiama a raccolta tutti i motivi e i caratteri principali, la scelta del poeta di accostarsi alle opere di Ovidio, Racine, Eschilo ed Euripide, in quella che negli anni Novanta sarà la parte conclusiva della sua parabola letteraria, dimostra, al di là di ogni svolta stilistica, l'ininterrotta persistenza del suo fervore mitografico. Infatti, se questa persistenza è attestata chiaramente, in chiave teorica, dal massiccio volume critico *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992),² si rivela anche nella necessità per Hughes di tor-

1. Tra i pochi contributi esistenti si vedano: T. West, *Ted Hughes*, London, Methuen, 1985, pp. 63-87; S.A. Brown, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid. From Chaucer to Ted Hughes*, London, Duckworth, 1999, pp. 217-27; D. Berry, "Rough Magic: Ted Hughes's Translation of Jean Racine's *Phèdre*", in P. Tomlinson (ed.), *French 'Classical' Theatre Today: Teaching, Research, Performance*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2001, pp. 207-28; D. Gervais, "Tragedy Today: Ted Hughes's *Oresteia*", *Cambridge Quarterly*, 31: 2 (2002), pp. 139-54; P. Faulkner, "The Story of Alcestis in William Morris and Ted Hughes", *Journal of the William Morris Society*, 16: 2-3 (Summer-Winter 2005), pp. 56-79.

2. Si tratta di uno studio di piglio strutturalistico intrapreso ricorrendo alla mitografia relativa alla figura cosmoteologica della Grande Dea e, in parte, anche riattualizzando i criteri archetipologici di *Storia delle origini della coscienza* di Erich Neumann. Il volume va ad ampliare una riflessione già avviata nell'introduzione hughesiana di *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (1971) (ora con il titolo "The Great Theme: Notes on Shakespeare", in T. Hughes, *Winter Pollen. Occasional Prose*, ed. by W. Scammell, London, Faber and Faber, 1994, pp. 103-21). In sintesi, le figure femminili shakespeariane sono sempre ricondotte all'amalgama ipostatico della "Great Goddess", mentre quelle maschili vengono interpretate in base ai modelli del "dio-sacrificato" e del "dio guerriero". Lo studio è doppiamente interessante, in quanto, attraverso Shakespeare, Hughes rilegge se stesso e, indirettamente, la complessa co-

nare ad ancorare e aprire il proprio immaginario a tracciati narrativi e nuclei simbolici di ordine archetipico in quell'ultima fase macrotestuale in cui l'*inventio*, e la parola, si allontanano maggiormente da ogni insistito mitologismo. In effetti, quello che si apre con *River* (1983) per proseguire lungo raccolte come *Flowers and Insects* (1986), caratterizzate da una scrittura tendenzialmente all'insegna dell'ipotiposi e della funzione descrittiva, è un fare poetico molto distante dai moduli della visionarietà surrealista, del sincretismo esasperato e dell'espressionismo ipertrofico tipici della "epic-folktale"³ di *Crow* (1970, 1971) o di opere vatiche come *Prometheus on His Crag* (1973, 1979) e *Adam and the Sacred Nine* (1979). Tuttavia, è proprio un riaffiorare del mito a chiudere l'*œuvre* hughesiana e, per quanto prevalentemente mediata attraverso i testi ai quali il poeta si avvicina in veste di traduttore e adattatore, a rilanciare appieno la sua *mythopoeia*, culminante così nella fioritura di versioni che va, peraltro, a chiudere il ciclo inaugurato dalla più lontana riscrittura dell'*Edipo* senecano.

Traspare piuttosto chiaramente, in ogni caso, che a indurre Hughes alla scelta di *Tales from Ovid* (1997) e alla stesura di *Racine's Phèdre* (1998), *The Oresteia of Aeschylus* (1999) e *The Alcestis of Euripides* (1999) sia stata la presenza, soprattutto nelle ultime tre opere e nei loro *mythoi*, di quegli stessi fasci tematico-simbolici dai quali era già stato attirato nell'impresa di *bricolage* e rifunzionalizzazione mitopoietica dei decenni precedenti. Gli studi antropologici e la lettura di Robert Graves, Carl Gustav Jung e Mircea Eliade lo avevano infatti spinto a trarre assiduamente dalla simbologia alchemica, come dalle mitologie più disparate, i *themata* e i *symbola* dell'incesto, del matricidio, della mostruosità e dell'eroismo di stampo erculeo,⁴ per poi modellarli, ricombinati in nuovi insiemi iconotropici, nelle complesse stratificazioni di opere come la stessa *Crow* o magari *Orgbast*.⁵ Un dramma, quest'ultimo, il cui *plot* fornisce anche un'ottima e utile sintesi narrativa e dinamica della principale tensione paradigmatica – tra principio maschile e femminile, culturale e naturale – che sottende da sempre l'intera struttura hughesiana: "In abstract, it is the story of the crime against material nature, the Creatress [...], by the Violater [sic], the mental tyrant [...], and her revenge".⁶ Utile perché proprio il conflitto, evocato qui dalla trama esemplare di *Orgbast* e dal suo binomio attanziale, si troverà spesso articolato da

struzione del proprio sistema simbolico.

3. T. Hughes, "Crow", Claddagh Records, CCT 9-10, 1973.

4. Anche dal magma delle *Metamorfosi* Hughes estrapola unicamente scene e intrecci a lui cari e congeniali – ventiquattro in tutto – e, tra questi, le parti che formano il dittico di "Hercules and Deianira" e "The Birth of Hercules" e, infine, la trama incestuosa di "Myrrha".

5. L'opera non è mai stata pubblicata integralmente.

6. Hughes cit. in A.C.H. Smith, *Orgbast at Persepolis*, London, Methuen, 1972, p. 132.

Hughes nei termini coagulanti e archetipici del motivo di una qualche lotta tra figure eroiche e mostruose, in cui le prime si trovano a consumare un simbolico atto di matricidio o, viceversa, incestuoso, in virtù del loro rapportarsi alla matrice naturale – “material nature” – i cui segni risultano variamente intrecciati dal poeta in un’isotopia della *monstrositas*.

A partire già dalle prime opere, percorse da immagini di divoramento tellurico e femminile e strutturate intorno agli assi della levità e della gravità – “I drown in the drumming ploughland, I drag up / Heel after heel from the swallowing of the earth’s mouth”, così si apre, notoriamente, il primo omonimo componimento di *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957)⁷ – Hughes denuncia la volontà di potenza di una razionalità sterile e avversa al richiamo catamorfo, nonché generativo, della materia, esposta come una *gaster* universale e dotata di qualità specificamente materne. Nella realtà materica, nel suo groviglio continuo di fertilità morticola, viene evocata un’immagine di circolarità – elementare sì, ma anche uterina e lunare – in cui si fondono i tratti della *matrix* e della *mater*, idealmente riconducibili alla forma e al portato simbolico di un *Ouroboros* primordiale ed eterno. Ovvero, una *prima materia e natura naturans* – “the Creatress”, ricorrendo ai termini di *Orghast* – il cui divenire incessante è in genere demonizzato dalle cerebrali maschere hughesiane come prevalentemente distruttivo. Quella urobolica e ofidica è poi una sostanza che anima anche l’elemento vitalistico ed energetico di molte creature della nota fauna poetica di Hughes, un folto bestiario il cui teriomorfismo evolve ben presto verso una resa di tipo teratologico. La mostruosità, con le sue forme caotiche, o ingigantite e mirabolanti, si fa allora iperbole animalesca, *portentum* naturale e ierofania sconosciuta – anzi, aborrita – della stessa “Creatress”. Così, i numerosi confronti tra ferinità e zoofobia umana, che in maniera tanto peculiare caratterizzano gli esordi del poeta per poi popolarne a lungo la fantasmagoria, si ritrovano già in *Wodwo* (1967) trasfigurati in senso mitologico⁸ e proprio sulla scorta di quei modelli di combattimento divino ed eroico che ispirano e plasmano la sua mitopoiesi⁹ e il cui significato viene ri-

7. T. Hughes, *The Hawk in the Rain*, London, Faber and Faber, 1957, p. 11, vv. 1-2.

8. Esemplare, in questo senso, il testo di “Gog”. Se i “wodwos” sono esseri ibridi e silvani, affrontati, insieme a fiere ed animali, dal protagonista del *romance* medievale *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, da cui la raccolta hughesiana prende il titolo, in “Gog” un fantasmatico cavaliere, “the Holy Warrior”, lotta contro una minacciosa creatura uterina – “the enemy, the grail, / The womb-wall”, “the octopus maw” e “the fanged grail and tireless mouth” (T. Hughes, *Wodwo*, London, Faber and Faber, 1967, pp. 152, 153, vv. 44, 48-49, 55, 75) – variamente associata a mostri preistorici e biblici. In proposito si veda la fondamentale lettura di K. Sagar in *The Art of Ted Hughes*, Cambridge, CUP, 1975, pp. 74-78.

9. Molto importante, per Hughes, è il mitologema del *Kosmokrator* e, in particolare, come annota il poeta, “of Jehovah, attempting to annihilate [...] the great serpentine Goddess” (T. Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, London, Faber and Faber, 1992, p. 83; in seguito citato

mandato a una rete intricata e fittissima di pertinenze.

Da una parte, nella versione demiurgica, questo significato è fatto coincidere, alla maniera di Eliade,¹⁰ con un dettato di fondazione culturale, di cui il poeta radicalizza gli estremi, leggendovi e proiettandovi il racconto del levarsi dalla Natura di un assetto patriarcale aggressivo e già ultra-razionalistico, rappresentato da divinità uraniche che usurpano, come nell'imprescindibile Graves di *The White Goddess* ("which I regard as the chief Holy Book of my poetic conscience",¹¹ scriverà Hughes in una lettera all'autore), un precedente culto matriarcale, cioè quello arcaico della Grande Dea o Grande Madre. Pertanto, se "[i]n olden times, the monster used to be worshipped as a goddess",¹² sostiene il poeta già nel 1967, il mito della lotta saurocida verrà progressivamente interpretato e rielaborato in quanto trama di soppressione della divinità dell'elemento materno – "the crime against material nature", ancora nei termini sintetici di *Orghest* – e soprattutto come *grand récit*, eziologico e autolegittimante, della civiltà, in special modo di quella occidentale.

Lo stesso mitologema del combattimento, rintracciato in chiave epico-eroica nelle fonti mitologiche e letterarie più diverse, verrà indicato quale metafora ordinativa di un principio di realtà oppressivo, incentrato sulla mistica marziale, e sulla sua mitologia, di "the mental tyrant", definito da Hughes anche "the frigid puritan"¹³ e poi "Goddess-destroyer" e "Holy Warrior".¹⁴ A questa nomenclatura plurima e tassonomia unica verranno ricondotte le ipostasi di una mascolinità repressiva, contrapposte alla serie utopica, già gravesiana, del "dio sacrificato" e consorte della Dea: "Attis, Thammuz, Adonis" – o "the Hanged Man"¹⁵ – e poi "Osiris",¹⁶ protagonisti di un *regressus ad uterum* da intendersi come allegorica riunione con il plesso naturale, materico e femminile, evocato dalla costellazione simbolica della Grande Madre.

Infine, fortemente influenzato dal pensiero junghiano, Hughes intende e ripropone gli elementi del combattimento anche in chiave psicologica, attualizzando quindi nella "teratomachia" una recita individuale e univer-

come *Shakespeare*). Hughes attinge comunque a una vasta gamma di miti cosmogonici nei quali la vittoria sul caos si fa modello divino per la lotta contro la bestialità nel mitologema del cosiddetto "eroe uccisore di mostri".

10. Cfr. M. Eliade, *Le sacré et le profane*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965.

11. Il contenuto della lettera, datata 20 luglio 1967, è citato da Richard P. Graves nel suo *Robert Graves and the White Goddess 1940-85*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995, p. 441.

12. T. Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, London, Faber and Faber, 1967, p. 107.

13. T. Hughes, "The Great Theme: Notes on Shakespeare", *cit.*, p. 114.

14. T. Hughes, *Shakespeare, cit., passim*. Cfr. *supra* n. 7.

15. Cfr. "The Hanged Man and the Dragonfly" [1984], in T. Hughes, *Winter Pollen, cit.*, pp. 84-102.

16. T. Hughes, *Shakespeare, cit., passim*.

sale in cui il mostro – come l’archetipo animale, correlativo oggettivo della *libido* umana – va ad incarnare gli stadi più atavici dell’essere, ovvero un sostrato di pulsioni istintuali che erompono a minacciare la saldezza dell’io razionale quanto più repressi e negati. In questo senso, nella competizione tra eroismo e mostruosità viene inscenato anche lo svolgersi di un rapporto conflittuale tra coscienza maschile e inconscio (femminile, in Jung, e altresì matrice della coscienza in chiave filogenetica ed ontogenetica) rispetto a cui l’incesto si farà sintesi ideale, e ancora *medium* metaforico, di una ricongiunzione con gli strati più profondi del sé.

In breve, l’antieroe hughesiano per antonomasia è sia un campione del patriarcato e del suo *ordo* culturale, sia un emblema dell’ego maschile – non a caso, detto poi “the Herculean ego”¹⁷ – che respinge lo spettro della materia e dell’inconscio con le sue suggestioni di mortalità e irrazionalità. Il poeta ne riconosce le tracce addirittura nella leggenda del santo patrono inglese, quel San Giorgio contro il drago in cui, come afferma Gilbert Durand,¹⁸ l’agiografia cristiana eredita il motivo mitologico dell’eroe combattente. Scrive Hughes:

The story of St. George is one example of the sort of story that you do not tell to children – it’s a suspect story. [...] It records, in fact, and it sets up as an ideal pattern for any dealing with unpleasant or irrational experience, the complete suppression of the terror. In other words it is the symbolic story of creating a neurosis.¹⁹

Forte di questo intreccio teorico e mitografico, il poeta muoverà a una ridefinizione assiologica del dato teratologico, rivisitato secondo una fenomenologia che vuole riscattare, sotto l’egida mostruosa, quelle che Derrida avrebbe indicato come le grandi rimozioni della metafisica e del logocentrismo.²⁰ Ma soprattutto, nel riavvaloramento del suo lato numinoso, ctonio e caotico, Hughes intende ricomporre la totalità del “complesso materno” così come questo si dà nella teoria junghiana,²¹ e cioè in una costruzio-

17. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

18. G. Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l’Imaginaire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1963 (*Le strutture antropologiche dell’immaginario*, Bari, Dedalo, 1972; cfr., in particolare, pp. 157-167).

19. T. Hughes, “Myth and Education”, *Children’s Literature in Education* 1 (1970), pp. 65-66.

20. Si tratta di un intento già chiaro all’inizio degli anni Sessanta e, prima ancora che in quelle maggiori, nelle opere per bambini: in queste Hughes vuole rovesciare certi parametri tradizionali avvalorando positivamente esseri ibridi, mastodonti preistorici e mostri vari. È così, per esempio, nel racconto *The Iron Man* (1970), a proposito del quale, ancora in relazione a San Giorgio, Hughes scrive che “this story of St. George and the dragon is exactly the story and exactly the symbolic condition [...] I’m trying to reverse. And so my little boy [...] instead of destroying the dragon, makes friend with the dragon; he includes the dragon in the world. [...] If I had been concerned to write an ordinary monster story [...] my little boy [...] would have been a Hercules” (*ibid.*, p. 65).

21. Cfr., in particolare, C.G. Jung, *Die Archetypen und das kollektive Unbewusste*, Olten, Walter, 1976 (*Gli archetipi e l’inconscio collettivo*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1980, vol. 1, pp. 77-108).

ne non troppo diversa, se non per il fatto di essere ascritta alla dimensione aprioristica dell'inconscio collettivo e della psicogenesi, da quella più o meno coeva della *diva triformis* di Graves. L'enantiomorfismo simbolico dell'archetipo nel primo, e dell'astro selenico nel secondo, si traduce in entrambi i casi nell'insieme misterioso delle ipostasi femminili della Dea, cioè nella composibilità duplice e trina delle sue personificazioni. Ecco che la coscienza maschile, e i suoi rappresentanti, sono assai spesso colti da Hughes nell'incapacità di comprendere e accettare del femminile, colpevolmente scisso in senso binario, la sua coincidenza inscindibile di "Queen of Hell" e "Queen of Love" nonché di "maiden, mother and crone".²²

Alla luce della "teratomachia", intesa come una tra le grandi invarianti, se non la maggiore, dello Hughes *bricoleur*,²³ e certo come struttura ideale in cui confluiscono le principali unità del suo assortimento mitologico, l'opera che nel grappolo di versioni degli anni Novanta si rivela essere più emblematica e ricca di riferimenti è indubbiamente *Alcestis*. Non solo questa ripropone, variato, il tema dell'eroismo ma, letta congiuntamente a *Seneca's Oedipus*, sembra anche andare a siglare – invero piuttosto ambigualmente, lo si vedrà – quella metamorfosi cui nel tempo il poeta sottopone il suo tipico antieroe, facendone, da "uccisore di mostri" e "Goddess-destroyer", un riscattatore del femminile. Inoltre, è proprio negli adattamenti da Seneca ed Euripide, i testi che presentano il più alto tasso di variazioni rispetto agli originali,²⁴ che si percepisce più chiaramente come il poeta non giunga alle opere prescelte per sola consonanza tematica o iconica, ma come piuttosto intenda rianimare i loro materiali mitologici, problematizzandone e rilanciandone i significati in base ad una peculiare "elaborazione del mito" la cui produttività ermeneutica, e creativa, è considerevolmente implicata anche, e soprattutto, nel *Leitmotiv* della lotta contro l'elemento mostruoso. Se questo non esaurisce i molteplici livelli di senso degli

22. T. Hughes, *Shakespeare, cit., passim*.

23. Per un'esposizione più approfondita del motivo demiurgico ed eroico rimando alla mia tesi di dottorato in Anglistica, discussa presso l'Università di Pisa il 18 settembre 2006: "Through the snakes and ladders / Of the creation and the decreation / Of the elements": *la dialettica cosmogonica nell'opera di Ted Hughes*.

24. Anche laddove intervenga con una minore densità di variazioni, come nel caso di *Oresteia*, Hughes si appropria dei testi originali grazie ad un'analisi assai articolata, secondo la quale "the Greek tragedies are [...] the creation story of civilization" (T. Hughes, *Shakespeare, cit.*, p. 85). Queste, al pari di gran parte della mitologia ellenica, vengono lette come narrazioni fondanti della cultura occidentale e quindi, insieme al narrato biblico, come i tracciati genetici di una civiltà che il poeta, nel suo risolutivo primitivismo, definisce "an evolutionary dead-end" ("The Environmental Revolution" [1970], in *Winter Pollen, cit.*, p. 129). Le vicende di Oreste sono perciò ricondotte nel reticolo di un complesso apparato speculativo, evidentemente imperniato sul conflitto – sulla sua genealogia e i suoi sviluppi storici – tra patriarcato e matriarcato, in cui il figlio di Agamennone e Clitennestra diviene un'ennesima personificazione di "Goddess-destroyer". L'opera eschilea riluce così, alla lettura hughesiana, di nuove sfumature e complicazioni assiologiche.

adattamenti, si rivela però un ottimo appiglio analitico attraverso cui verificare, e mostrare, come Hughes intervenga sulle opere originali.

Da questo punto di vista, e a partire da *Seneca's Oedipus*, l'adattamento del 1969 colpisce allora per come della tragedia sia stato enfatizzato, quale nodo portante, il confronto piuttosto periferico tra Edipo e la Sfinge e, del protagonista, il suo ruolo relativamente marginale di sopraffattore della mostruosità. Di fatto, nell'introduzione che apre il rifacimento, il poeta chiarisce la sua lettura dell'opera senecana, e più in generale del mito edipico, proprio in questo senso, specificando inoltre le ragioni di un certo apprezzamento per il testo latino, in cui maggiormente rilucerebbe la presenza del cardine archetipico della "teratomachia", forse intuiva dallo stesso Seneca e certo colta da Hughes alla maniera in cui guarderà alle opere shakespeariane, ovvero "through the surface glitter of the plot into the depth of the mythic plane".²⁵ L'autore latino concede infatti alla retrospettiva della sfida con la Sfinge uno spazio più ampio di quello riservato da Sofocle. Inoltre il suo Edipo, diversamente da quello greco, è al centro di una vera tragedia psicologica, in cui lo scenario interiore è fuoco dell'ambiguità introiettata e fonte di un'angoscia tormentosa da cui si leva il sentore di un delitto commesso, ovvero il sospetto di avere in qualche modo fallito la prova dell'indovinello. Si leva cioè la "paura che la Sfinge", scrive in proposito Guido Paduano, "non sia stata veramente sconfitta, e che siano le sue potenzialità enigmatiche a creare [...] la rovina di Tebe".²⁶ Secondo simili presupposti, il testo di Seneca si sarebbe prestato, meglio di quello sofocleo, alle intenzioni della riscrittura di Hughes,²⁷

to make a text that would release whatever inner power this story, in its plainest, bluntest form, still has, and to unearth [...] the ritual possibilities within it. Sophocles's Oedipus would not have been so suitable for this experiment as Seneca's. [...] the evolution of his play seems complete, fully explored and in spite of its blood-roots, fully civilized. The figures in Seneca's *Oedipus* are Greek only by convention: by nature they are more primitive than aboriginals. [...] Seneca hardly notices the intricate moral possibilities of his subject. [...] his imagination is quietly producing something else – a series of epic descriptions that contain the raw dream of Oedipus, the basic, poetic, mythical substance of the fable, and [...] this part has not dated at all. For everybody must answer the sphynx [sic]. When Oedipus gave the Greek answer, "Man", he begged the question. Seneca, with accurate poetic intuition, concentrates on the real answer: the grisly stations, that Oedipus must go through from that moment, towards the final deeply ambiguous blinding: the sacred, ritual progress under the marriage of

25. T. Hughes, *Shakespeare, cit.*, p. 39.

26. Cfr. G. Paduano, "Infelicità senza desideri", in Seneca, *Edipo*, a cura di G. Paduano, Milano, BUR, 1993, pp. 5-24.

27. Il poeta vi arriva, va detto, grazie alla chiamata di Peter Brook, con il quale avrebbe collaborato anche alla produzione di *Orgbast*.

love and death. In Seneca's hands [...] this story becomes something close to the scenario of a mystery play, in the religious sense.²⁸

Come si legge, l'analisi della tragedia fa capo alla volontà di riscoprire le radici pre-morali del fascio simbolico edipico, la cui origine viene fatta affondare verso un confine primitivo, ben anteriore a quello dell'elaborazione letteraria greca e – lo si legge tra le righe per poi evincerlo dall'analisi – agli sviluppi futuri e sovrastrutturali della *fabula* nella cultura moderna, notoriamente fondati sulla traccia sofoclea. I suoi contenuti sono dunque fatti regredire alla volta di un nocciolo d'immaginazione teriomorfa, cristallizzato intorno all'essenza e alla presenza sfingea, e cioè verso quell'elaborazione immaginifica di cui Durand avrebbe scritto che “oltrepassa di molto, tanto nello spazio quanto nell'ontogenesi, l'era della crisi edipica e la zona della borghesia viennese della *belle époque*”.²⁹ Ciò che preme a Hughes è allora, *more solito*, desedimentare quella che ritiene essere la struttura profonda del mito, peraltro specificamente connotata anche in senso onirico – “the raw dream of Oedipus” – e quindi, con Jung, ancora archetipico. La sua attualità e universalità è pertanto annessa non già alle problematiche etiche evocate dall'*Edipo Re né*, eventualmente, a quelle sollevate dalla lettura freudiana, quanto piuttosto al confronto con la madre transpersonale e divina, incarnata, prima che da Giocasta, dalla Sfinge stessa: “for everybody must answer the sphynx [sic]”. Le interpolazioni andranno perciò ad acuire, della vicenda, soprattutto il rapporto triadico fra Edipo, la regina di Tebe e l'arcano sfingeo. Un arcano a cui il discendente di Cadmo avrebbe offerto, sostiene Hughes, una risposta errata, dunque presumibilmente ingannandosi sulle proprie facoltà intellettuali al modo in cui Jung avrebbe affermato che Edipo “[i]gnorava che l'intelligenza dell'uomo non è mai all'altezza dell'enigma della sfinge”, e che “[l]'enigma della sfinge era la sfinge stessa”.³⁰

Il motivo enigmatico segna così da subito l'adattamento, facendosi soglia paratestuale, *mise en abîme* e possibile chiave di lettura primaria in quella che è una rielaborazione del quesito della Sfinge, riportato alla superficie della tragedia quasi fosse un tassello mancante e, implicitamente, ad amplificarne l'importanza, dato che, vale forse la pena ricordarlo, una sua formulazione non compare né in Sofocle né in Seneca. Anzi, scrive ancora Paduano che se “[d]iversamente da Sofocle [...] Seneca descrive con

28. T. Hughes, “Introduction”, in *Seneca's Oedipus*, London, Faber and Faber, 1968, pp. 7-8.

29. G. Durand, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

30. C.G. Jung, *Symbole der Wandlung. Analyse des Vorspiels zu einer Schizophrenie*, Zürich, Rascher, 1952 (*Simboli della trasformazione. Analisi dei prodromi di un caso di schizofrenia*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 1965 [1970], pp. 183-84).

una certa ampiezza l'incontro tra Edipo e la Sfinge; neppure Seneca [...] si interessa ai contenuti dell'indovinello".³¹ L'adattamento prevede invece una versione epigrafica, piuttosto stilizzata e apparentemente semplificata, dell'enigma, in cui tuttavia spiccano due elementi di massima diversità rispetto alla tradizione: la pluralità di voci a porgere la domanda rituale e la stessa risposta edipica:

show us
 show us
 a simple riddle lift everything aside

 show us
 a childish riddle

 what has four legs at dawn
 two legs at noon three legs at dusk

 and is it weakest when it has most?

 'I will find the answer' is that an answer?
 show us³²

L'uso del pronome plurale "us" sembra suggerire che il mostro, di per sé incarnazione totemica, rappresenti un'ipostasi plurima, dietro le cui spoglie infernali più avanti minuziosamente descritte, si nasconderebbe la presenza della duplice e tripla dea.³³ Proprio nel delineare i numi tutelari di molte delle sue creature bestiali e demoniche, Hughes avrebbe più volte chiamato in causa la coalescenza della Goddess, per esempio assimilando il falco predatore del noto componimento "Hawk Roosting",³⁴ a "Isis, mother of the gods",³⁵ e incastonando poi la stessa Iside in una teoria sin-

31. G. Paduano, in Seneca, *Edipo*, cit., p. 48, n. 26; l'indovinello ci è noto "nella versione fornita dalla terza hypothesis all'*Edipo Re*" (*ibid.*).

32. T. Hughes, *Seneca's Oedipus*, cit., p. 11. Le peculiarità grafiche nelle citazioni dall'adattamento sono conformi alle scelte di Hughes.

33. La riscrittura dell'indovinello potrebbe forse essere ascritta all'influenza gravesiana più concretamente di quanto non sia stato fatto finora. Scrive infatti Graves: "The anecdote of the Sphinx [sic] has evidently been deduced from an icon showing the winged Moon-goddess of Thebes [...] to whom the new king offers his devotions before marrying her priestess, the Queen. It seems also that the riddle which the Sphinx [sic] learned from the Muses has been invented to explain a picture of an infant, a warrior, and an old man, all worshipping the Triple-goddess: each pays his respects to a different person of the triad. But the Sphinx [sic], overcome by Oedipus, killed herself, and so did her priestess Iocaste. Was Oedipus a thirteenth-century invader of Thebes, who suppressed the old Minoan cult of the goddess [...]? Under the old system, the new king, though a foreigner, had theoretically been a son of the old king whom he killed and whose widow he married; a custom that the patriarchal invaders misrepresented as parricide and incest" (*The Greek Myths*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1955, 1960, vol. 2, p. 13).

34. T. Hughes, *Lupercal*, London, Faber and Faber, 1960, p. 18.

35. "Ted Hughes and Crow: An Interview with Ekbert Faas" [1970], in E. Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, Santa Barbara, Black Sparrow Press, 1980, p. 199.

cretistica di divinità dalle molte facce:

Venus is not only the Goddess of love, she is the Queen of Heaven [...]. She is also the Queen of Hell [...] she is also Hecate, goddess of witchcraft [...], the underworld, spirits, the moon, darkness, hounds etc. As Venus again, she is also Isis, mother of all the gods, and all living things: she is Nature.³⁶

Ancor più esplicitamente verrà ribadita una norma valevole per tutte le epifanie della Dea:

In every epiphany of the Goddess the two aspects [i.e. “Queen of Heaven” e “Queen of Hell”] are present – one latent behind the other. In the foreground they appear to be two, and opposites, but in the background they are one. These two aspects are the most regular manifestations of the great triple Goddess’s three aspects: the Mother, the Sacred Bride, and the Queen of the Underworld.³⁷

La Sfinge sarebbe dunque una teofania ctonia ma anche una *pars pro toto* della totalità del divino materno. In ogni caso, le parole di chi, replicando al quesito sfingeo dell’epigrafe con una risposta diversa da “man”, si presenta come un Edipo ideale, evocano più possibili responsi. In primo luogo, suggeriscono quale giusta soluzione il riconoscimento della necessità di una ricerca, quindi di una forma di verità che non sia né definitiva né definitoria, ma piuttosto uno scoprimento *in fieri*. Varrebbe a dire che la complessità della manifestazione dell’archetipo materno non può essere sciolta con gli strumenti della ragione, né tanto meno risolta con una risposta univoca. E poi, ancora, la risposta sembra forse poter celare la certezza per l’interrogato di comprendere, o forse subire, prima o poi, il reale significato dell’apparizione mostruosa; “I will find the answer” evocherebbe in questo caso una consapevolezza della vera natura del *monstrum*, cioè dell’unione in esso di *Thanatos* ed *Eros*, quella stessa che nell’introduzione Hughes indicava come “the real answer” e cioè il cammino di *passio* che il protagonista dovrà percorrere alla volta della sua scoperta.

Il dato di fondo è comunque che il tema dell’indovinello risulta centrale e ricorrente nel repertorio di situazioni cui sono sottoposte le maschere poetiche hughesiane, prima e dopo *Seneca’s Oedipus*. L’intero macrotesto è infatti percorso da *riddles* che sempre decretano per l’io poetico il dovere di definirsi in relazione alla matrice naturale, le cui incarnazioni si presentano sempre a chiedere un riconoscimento. In *Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama* (1978), per esempio, ricompare proprio il coacervo simbolico dell’icona sfingea, significativamente bicefala nel componimento della sequenza intitolato “The Gatekeeper” – “A reflective sphynx. / A two-

36. T. Hughes, “The Great Theme: Notes on Shakespeare”, *cit.*, pp. 111-12.

37. T. Hughes, *Shakespeare, cit.*, p. 7.

headed questioner” – e ancora legata al motivo incestuoso in “The Riddle”: “Who am I? / Just as you are my father / I am your bride”.³⁸ E così via, di enigma in enigma, fino all’ultima decisiva istanza nella traduzione da Racine, in cui Fedra, ennesima parvenza umana della Dea presa d’amore incestuoso per il figliastro che la respinge, proclamerà senza infingimenti, e con parole di piena invenzione hughesiana, la sua natura mostruosa e misteriosa: “I was the monster in this riddle”.³⁹

S’intrecciano così le trame della teratologia, dell’interrogativo rituale e dell’incesto. Si annodano perfino in assenza di una vera realizzazione: si sarebbero dovute incontrare, infatti, anche nell’epilogo di *Crow*, un’opera scritta negli stessi anni dell’adattamento da Seneca e ad esso strettamente correlata, tanto che pagine scritte per quello verranno invece incluse nell’epica enciclopedica del Corvo,⁴⁰ di cui il tema edipico forma uno dei più rilevanti *refrain* interni. Nel compendiare e rovesciare parodicamente alcuni tra i fondamentali tracciati mitologici e teologici alla base della cultura occidentale – soprattutto biblici e classici – *Crow* prevedeva un finale mai completato, una sorta di *happy ending* fiabesco in linea con le radici folcloriche del volatile protagonista, modulato sulla sagoma del cosiddetto “buffone divino”, o *trickster*. Del Corvo, Hughes avrebbe detto che “Crow’s whole quest aims to locate and release his own creator, God’s [...] prisoner, whom he encounters repeatedly but always in some unrecognisable form”.⁴¹ E, come già sostenuto da Keith Sagar, la forma più frequente in cui Crow misconosce il suo creatore è quella ofidica,⁴² finché,

Crow comes to a river which he must cross to get to the Happy Land where he believes his bride awaits him. Sitting beside the river is a hag, an ogress, a great monstrous assemblage of all the horrific parts of all the female beings he’s encountered on the way. She demands that he carry her across the river. She’s huge, so he has no choice. So he gets her on his shoulders [...]. Suddenly she begins to get heavier and heavier, until her weight drives him down into the gravel. [...] she stops growing heavier and asks him a question. It is a question about all the female figures he’s encountered on his journey, about the relationship between male and female [...]. But it is also a dilemma question [...] without any final answer, or with several contradictory answers [...]. With each question Crow learns from his earlier mistakes, and makes fewer [...] the hag leaps from his back. She has become a beautiful, lithe, naked maiden, who runs towards an oak-wood with Crow in pursuit.⁴³

38. T. Hughes, *Cave Birds* [1978], in *Three Books: Remains of Elmet, Cave Birds, River*, London, Faber and Faber, 1993, p. 82, vv. 1-2, p. 90, vv. 1-3.

39. T. Hughes, *Racine’s Phèdre* [1998], New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999, p. 87.

40. Cfr., in particolare, “Song for a Phallus” (T. Hughes, *Crow*, London, Faber and Faber, 1970, pp. 69-71).

41. T. Hughes, “Crow”, Claddagh Records, *cit.*

42. Cfr. K. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, *cit.*, p. 118.

43. Il finale è ricostruito da K. Sagar, sulla base di materiale non pubblicato, registrazioni e vari inter-

Anche nel caso degli enigmi cui il corvetto avrebbe dovuto essere sottoposto da parte di una creatura difforme (e schiacciante: la mastodonticità e la gravità sono infatti, in Hughes, segni caratteristici della materia femminile fintantoché non ne venga riconosciuta anche la dimensione dispensatrice) non si dà una risposta univoca, inevitabilmente riduttiva rispetto ai quesiti evocati. Sebbene mai ultimato, lo schema del finale fornisce un'ipotesi interpretativa per l'adattamento da Seneca: la soluzione del dilemma consiste non nella distruzione del mostro, ma nel superamento, dopo un tragitto di sofferenza, della sua foggia spaventosa di *mater terribilis*, e della scoperta in essa di un potenziale rigenerativo – evocato dall'unione sponsale tra Crow e la “naked maiden” – del resto tradizionalmente implicato tanto nel motivo dell'indovinello e della *quest*, quanto in quello dell'incesto mistico. Tuttavia, il re tebano non è tra quei personaggi hughesiani in grado di riconoscere la sintesi della divinità materna, ché la svolta in questo senso è segnata da testi ed eroi successivi, come per esempio dal già citato *Cave Birds*. In esso, risolutrice e catartica sarà per la *persona* poetica proprio l'unione celebrata, per esempio, nel componimento “Bride and Groom Lie Hidden for Three Days”⁴⁴ e adattata sul modello alchemico, nonché su miti e fonti egizie. Così, calato nella trama classica, l'Edipo di Hughes è condannato proprio per aver disatteso l'auspicio del preludio epigrafico e, pertanto, per non aver realmente compreso il significato del totem sfingeo. Ciò è confermato dai versi in cui il protagonista rivive l'episodio della sfida:

[...] she straddled her rock her nest of
 smashed skulls and bones her face was a gulf her
 gaze paralysed her victims [...]
 [...]
 jaws clashing together biting the air yet I stood
 there and I asked for the riddle I was calm
 her talons gouged splinters up off the rock saliva
 poured from her fangs she screamed her whole
 body shuddering the words came slowly the
 riddle that monster's justice which was a death
 sentence a trap of forked meanings a noose of
 knotted words yet I took it I undid it I
 solved it
 [...]
 yet she's not dead as if I'd never solved her riddle
 she never died she changed I drove her off the
 rock and the questions stopped but her rottenness

venti di Hughes, nel suo *The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes*, Liverpool University Press, 2000, pp. 179-80.

44. T. Hughes, *Cave Birds*, cit., p. 97.

is flying her stench is a fog smothering us as if
we were living inside her carcase⁴⁵

Hughes dilata e arricchisce della Sfinge l'aspetto orrido da "ventre divorante", peraltro connotato anche in chiave gorgonica ("her gaze paralyzed her victims"), insistendo, attraverso il ricordo di Edipo, su ciò che Durand avrebbe definito "simbolismo stomacale" o "voracità dentaria" della mostruosità "infemminita", e cioè la proiezione in essa di un potere catabolico e sprofondante.⁴⁶ Il futuro re sostiene infatti come l'indovinello corrispondesse a una "death sentence", cioè a un dettame mortifero, quello che nella risposta classica è associato al destino dell'uomo dall'infanzia alla vecchiaia ed è quindi alieno alla natura arcaica della Grande Dea e del suo culto, correlati semmai ad un orizzonte ritmico di ciclicità rigenerativa. L'errore valutativo di Edipo è perciò segnalato da Hughes con incisività – "as if I never solved her riddle", dichiara il protagonista – e inoltre, se la peste abbattutasi su Tebe è in Seneca comunque ascritta alla distruzione del mostro, nella versione inglese l'origine del morbo è invece attribuita ad una sua sopravvivenza metamorfosata e, pertanto, al fallimento di Edipo nel suo tentativo di vincere la *monstrositas*.

Ricorrendo ancora ai fondamenti della poetica hughesiana e ad altre istanze macrotestuali, il passo è da intendersi come un'affermazione dell'impossibilità per l'uomo di eliminare o domare il lato oscuro della realtà naturale e interiore. La pestilenza tebana sembra per esempio servire da modello a quella che in *Gaudete* (1977) colpirà un anonimo *village* inglese, afflitto da una strenua repressione delle energie libidiche – erotiche e ctonie – che, frustrate, irrompono a devastare la popolazione e la terra. Poiché Edipo crede inizialmente di aver vinto e quindi esorcizzato il *monstrum*, esso ritorna sotto altre spoglie a minacciare l'ordine istituito nel regno tebano, le cui basi poggiano proprio sulla morte della Sfinge. In questo senso, se anche in Seneca la peste si dà come nemesi misteriosa, nel rifacimento essa è chiaramente associata non solo ad una trasmutazione del mostro, ma soprattutto al suo perdurare e incombere alla stregua di un "ritorno del rimosso" che va ad avverarsi nel rapporto tra Edipo e Giocasta,

45. T. Hughes, *Seneca's Oedipus*, cit., pp. 18-19. Nella traduzione di Guido Paduano l'originale recita: "ho affrontato il volto sanguinoso della nefanda profetessa e la vista del suolo biancheggiante di ossa disperse; e mentre già dall'alto della rupe piombava addosso alla preda spiegando le ali e muovendo la coda come una sferza, e minacciando come un feroce leone, le ho chiesto l'enigma. Risuonò in alto terribile: crepitarono le mascelle, e impaziente graffiava la roccia aspettando le mie viscere: ma io sciolsi il nodo e l'intreccio delle parole ingannevoli, e risolsi l'enigma del mostro alato. [...] È proprio la spaventevole cenere del mostro astuto che si solleva contro di noi; pure distrutta, è quella la malattia che distrugge Tebe" (Seneca, *Edipo*, cit., pp. 47, 49)

46. Cfr. G. Durand, cit., *passim*.

che del mostro rappresenta il doppio vivente.

In quella che è la più lunga e consistente interpolazione dell'intero adattamento, la regina è effettivamente caratterizzata come una figura di Grande Dea, tramite di una forza biologica che non ammette deroghe e oltrepassa il profilo umano. Recita il primo monologo della madre e sposa di Edipo:

when I carried my sons
 I carried them for death I carried them for the throne
 I carried them for final disaster when I carried my first son
 [...]

 I knew the thing in my womb was going to have to pay for the whole past
 I knew the future was waiting for him like a greedy god in a man-eater cave
 was going to ask for everything happiness strength and finally life
 [...]

 I carried him for disease
 for rottenness and dropping to pieces
 I carried him for death bones dust I knew⁴⁷

Nell'apertura del suo *récit*, le parole di Giocasta evocano una visione dolorosamente consapevole, e atroce, dell'apparente inutilità del vivere, semplice presupposto di sofferenza e mortalità. Vi si riconosceranno, oltretutto, alcuni termini usati da Edipo per descrivere la Sfinge, il suo nido e la sua maledizione ("death", "bones", "rottenness"), elementi lessicali che il protagonista sembra dunque attingere dalla *pars destruens* del pezzo della regina e proiettare di lì a poco nel ricordo dell'enigma, la cui ricostruzione segue immediatamente il monologo e crea, nel ricordo edipico, un legame tra maternità distruttiva e mostruosità. Questo nonostante il senso complessivo del brano di Giocasta sia integrato da una seconda parte, in cui la donna si ricorda posseduta da una prorompente *vis* generativa, capace di annientare qualsiasi remora nichilistica:

[...] my blood didn't pause
 didn't hesitate in my womb
 considering the futility
 [...]

 blind blood blood from my gums and eyelids
 blood from the roots of my hair blood from before any time began
 it flowed into the knot of his bowels, into the knot of his muscles
 the knot of his brain
 my womb tied everything together every corner of the earth and the heavens
 [...]

 the strength of the whole earth

47. T. Hughes, *Seneca's Oedipus, cit.*, pp. 16-17.

pushed him through my body and out
 [...]

he was a king's son he was a man's shape
 he was perfect
 [...]

he was the warrant of the gods
 he was their latest attempt
 to walk on earth and to live
 he only had to live⁴⁸

Medium per la vita e la morte, nella regina si scontrano e convivono dunque forza erotica (di un eros legatore, ponte fra cielo e terra) e letale, ma l'ultima parte del monologo sembra assegnare alla fertilità procreativa e al sangue uterino un potere soverchiante, primordiale, premondano e quindi anche demiurgico – “blood before any time began” – che trasfigura Giocasta in una sorta di grembo universale e cosmico, un *axis mundi* le cui qualità trapassano alla sua progenie, la quale dice essere fatta interamente di lei, delle sue membra e viscere persino in quella fibra cerebrale che gli attori hughesiani vorrebbero “altra” rispetto alla materia. Il figlio (dunque, Edipo stesso) è anch'egli delineato, e proprio in virtù della sua perfetta umanità, come un corpo ierogamico, divinità incarnata, un nodo congiuntivo tra dimensione celeste e tellurica, così come una *coincidentia oppositorum* è del resto quella sfingea, animalesca nel corpo e femminile nel volto, a rappresentare una combinazione d'istinto e ragione, carne e intelletto, madre animalesca e madre umana. L'interpolazione fa dunque di Giocasta un personaggio dissimile dal suo stampo greco o latino, e dotato di una carica transpersonale di cui il monologo invita ad accettare il portato vitalistico, cieco all'apparente insensatezza dell'esistere – “blind blood” – .

La cecità creativa del sangue e della materia organica richiama, per opposizione, il motivo dell'accecamento edipico e introduce così il tema dell'autodistruzione attraverso il matricidio. Nel rifiuto del mostruoso e nel rinnegamento della propria continuità con la matrice materna, sostiene Hughes e avverte il monologo di Giocasta, l'uomo respinge anche se stesso e la combinazione di elemento naturale e divino in sé. Lo si evince già in “Gog”, in cui la *persona* poetica si scaglia contro una creatura mostruosa “Whose coil is under his ribs”,⁴⁹ successivamente, e in più diretta relazione a *Seneca's Oedipus*, lo si legge in “Prospero and Sycorax”, vero e proprio compendio di attori paradigmatici: “She knows, like George's dragon / Her screams have closed his helmet. / She knows, like Jocasta, / It is

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

49. T. Hughes, *Wodwo, cit.*, p. 153, v. 77. Cfr. *supra* n. 7.

over. / He prefers / Blindness. / [...] / He has found / Something / Easier to live with – / His death, and her death.”⁵⁰ Al di là di un ulteriore ribadimento del nesso tra teratologia e femminile, quest’ultimo testo suggerisce, retrospettivamente, che ciò che nell’introduzione all’adattamento del 1969 veniva indicato da Hughes come “the final deeply ambiguous blinding” altro non rappresenterebbe che il ripudio della regina, madre e sposa, come fonte d’illuminazione e rigenerazione. La ferita che il re s’infligge si profila perciò non come conseguenza punitiva per l’incesto commesso, ma come ottenebramento volontario di fronte alle potenzialità dell’unione con Gio-casta, il cui suicidio ripete infine quello della Sfinge.

Edipo rifiuta così due volte l’elemento materno; inoltre, respinge colpevolmente l’incesto, e proprio a questa circostanza è legato il contenuto primitivo e pre-morale che Hughes legge nella tragedia, rinvenendovi dunque i resti di una religiosità arcaica legati al motivo rituale del figlio-amante sacrificato alla Dea, ma trasformati in un più moderno racconto di eroismo matricida, così come avrebbe poi scritto in *Shakespeare*: “the sacrificed god [...] pupate[s] – and become[s] a Goddess-destroyer”.⁵¹ Infatti, i diversi e contrapposti *typoi* maschili, più volte evocati dal poeta, rappresenterebbero non solo due differenti modi di rapportarsi al femminile, ma anche due fasi distinte dell’evoluzione filogenetica: il “Goddess-destroyer” è tipicamente l’eroe culturale, mentre l’altro, il “sacrificed, reborn consort of the Goddess”,⁵² è invece legato alla grande maternità primordiale e preistorica. Edipo segnerebbe dunque un passaggio nella trasformazione dall’uno all’altro, cioè dal *pharmakos* all’“eroe uccisore di mostri” lungo il progressivo affermarsi di quello che Hughes considera essere il mitologema più rappresentativo della civiltà occidentale: “the myth of the Goddess-destroyer who from the infancy and through the adolescence of Western religious history had overtaken, again and again, the myth of the Great Goddess and her sacrificed god”.⁵³

L’incontro con la Sfinge viene perciò interpretato dal poeta così come Adorno e Horkheimer commentavano, in *Dialettica dell’illuminismo*, gli incontri di Ulisse con le creature mostruose dell’*Odissea*, e cioè alla stregua di un confronto tra *ratio* e natura, tra numinosità ctonia e mito illuministico, in cui i “mostri mitici” simboleggiano il riemergere di “contratti pietrificati, diritti preistorici” ormai surclassati da mitologie a carattere solare e olimpico: “è così”, scrivono i due filosofi, “che la religione popolare più

50. T. Hughes, *Earth- numb*, in *Moortown*, London, Faber and Faber, 1979, p. 148, vv. 3-8, 14-17.

51. T. Hughes, *Shakespeare*, *cit.*, p. 16.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

antica si presenta, nei suoi sparsi relitti, all'età patriarcale avanzata".⁵⁴ In questo senso, Hughes ascrive a Edipo le qualità e i tratti tipici dell' "eroe greco tradizionale (un Teseo, un Eracle)," cioè di colui che, scriveva Leo Spitzer leggendo la *Phèdre* di Racine, "si distingue [...] con imprese [...] che liberano il mondo da mostri" che intendono "mettere in pericolo il trionfo dell'umana ragione e civiltà".⁵⁵ Il mito edipico viene perciò inteso come un *plot* di consolidamento culturale in cui è sancito il divieto alla regressione – in chiave collettiva – verso il regno della "Goddess"; d'altro canto, il poeta fa del suo protagonista anche un *everyman* al cospetto dell'archetipo materno e della sua insolubile complessità.

La visione sottesa alla "teratomachia" e la sua elaborazione mitopoietica troveranno infine il proprio esaurimento nell'epilogo di *Prometheus on His Crag*, in cui la rivisitazione delle vicende del titano prevede che questo sia incatenato per aver allontanato gli uomini dalle loro radici terrene con il dono del fuoco uranico. La libertà gli sarà concessa, significativamente, non per intervento di Eracle contro l'uccello torturatore, come vuole la mitologia classica, ma per aver infine riconosciuto in esso un caleidoscopio di figure materne, dotate di poteri redentivi e, nel martirio, una necessaria espiazione della *hybris* contro il femminile ("the vulture was the revenge of the wombs").⁵⁶ Da lì in avanti il poeta muoverà progressivamente al recupero di una parola poetica più referenziale e percettiva, affidandosi a un tessuto metaforico concreto, in cui pare riemergere quella cosiddetta "poetry of observation" che, nella transizione tra anni Cinquanta e Sessanta, aveva caratterizzato i suoi esordi, nutriti d'investigazioni zoologiche e naturalistiche che ora si arricchiscono di nuove venature paniche. L'io lirico si fa dunque pieno cantore, per esempio in *Flowers and Insects*, di una Creazione in cui intelletto e materia sono finalmente riconciliati in una poesia della fusione (cui poi corrisponderà il metamorfismo di elemento naturale, umano e divino in *Tales from Ovid*), del brulichio vitale, del pansessualismo e della fecondità cosmica.⁵⁷ La morte sarà pienamente riconosciuta e

54. M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* [1944], Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1969 (*Dialettica dell'illuminismo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976, p. 65).

55. Cfr. L. Spitzer, *Critica stilistica e semantica storica*, Bari, Laterza, 1976, p. 157.

56. T. Hughes, *Prometheus on His Crag*, in *Moortown*, London, Faber and Faber, 1979, p. 83.

57. Da questa tendenza generale si discosta *Birthday Letters* (1998). E davvero, per la sua ispirazione autobiografica radicata nel rapporto amoroso con la poetessa americana Sylvia Plath, l'opera rappresenta un caso unico nella parabola di un poeta che mai, altrove, indulge nella vena memoriale o confessionale. Vi sono comunque insinuati motivi mitologici che fanno da contrappunto alla vicenda umana della coppia, irretita dalla disseminazione hughesiana in un destino irrevocabile, quasi una trama da rito sacrificale. La sequenza si avvicina perciò, idealmente, al recupero di modelli mitici dei tardi anni Novanta, secondo ciò che Hughes avrebbe scritto dei personaggi shakespeariani: "a human being is only half alive if their life on the realistic, outer plane does not have the full assent and cooperation of

accettata come processo vitale, la materia colta come nel ritratto floreale di “Big Poppy”, ovvero “Bleeding inwardly / Her maternal nectars into her own / Coffin – (cradle of her offspring)”⁵⁸ e la mostruosità rivelata quale prodigio miracoloso, come in “Saint’s Island”:

This is a day for small marvels.
 The Mayflies are leaving their Mother.
 [...]

 The ridgy Lough.
 Weird womb. Beneath us
 It gestates a monster –
 Monstrous, but tiny. When it appears
 We’ll call it the Green Drake.
 At the moment, down there in the mud,
 It’s something else –
 The dream of an alchemist⁵⁹

Nel caleidoscopio naturale delle ultime raccolte, infine, la pienezza di forme e il formicolare della vita saranno solo occasionalmente affiancati, o impreziositi, da suggestioni di carattere mitologico che, se a tratti scoprono trame nascoste sotto la superficie di referenzialità, non vogliono però mai trascendere o sussumere del tutto l’effetto di reale. E tuttavia, Hughes sembra voler suggellare quell’ideale riconciliazione tra uomo e Dea proprio grazie a un *pattern* mitico in cui rilanciare il motivo della follia “teratocida” e però, al contempo, redimere il suo vecchio antieroe, concedendogli la possibilità di sottrarre il femminile alla morte. Il compito è affidato proprio ad Eracle nel rifacimento di *Alcestis* da Euripide. Qui, il lottatore viene almeno in parte affrancato dal ruolo prevalentemente negativo che più volte gli era stato assegnato, per esempio in *Crow*, laddove veniva evocato soprattutto per le sue fatiche di sterminatore dell’animalità e della mostruosità; oppure in *Cave Birds*, in cui la *persona* maschile al centro del processo *post mortem* che vi viene inscenato accorpa in sé proprio Eracle e Socrate, cioè l’“eroe uccisore di mostri” per eccellenza e il filosofo condannato da Hughes in quanto primo iniziatore del logocentrismo occidentale.⁶⁰ Del resto, se anco-

their life on the mythic plane. The whole business of art [...] even at its most naturalistic [...] is to reopen negotiations with the mythic plane” (T. Hughes, *Shakespeare, cit.*, p. 106).

58. T. Hughes, *Flowers and Insects*, London, Faber and Faber, 1986, p. 53, vv. 18-20.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 26, vv. 1-2, 4-11.

60. Anche Socrate è fatto “Goddess-destroyer”: “The crime for which he is judged [...] in the sequence, is not the crime of which the Athenians accused him – rather the one for which (from one point of view) history holds him responsible, namely, the murder of the Mediterranean Goddess” (Hughes cit. in A. Skea, *Ted Hughes: The Poetic Quest*, Armidale (NSW), University of New England Press, 1994, p. 41).

ra in *Shakespeare* il *typos* erculeo, “the supreme warrior”, incarnazione di “manhood and honour”⁶¹ è per esempio stabilito in rapporto antitetico con Osiride quale consorte ideale della “Goddess”, Hughes si rivela anche destreggiatore consapevole della variabilità e ricchezza del simbolismo di cui l’eroe, archetipo misterico e magico, è portatore,⁶² al punto da esaltare i tratti catabatici della sua iconografia e ricondurli ad uno schema rituale paradigmaticamente contrapposto a quello della “teratomachia” e spesso indicato come l’unica e vera “Heroic Quest”.⁶³

Si tratta di un’impresa che già negli anni Settanta veniva assimilata dal poeta alle coordinate principali dello sciamanismo, così come queste sono impostate dagli studi di Eliade;⁶⁴ quindi, di una capacità di muoversi fra cielo e terra, “for moving [...] among the various spiritual realms, and for generally dealing with souls and spirits”, scrive Hughes riconoscendo i caratteri di quel viaggiare anche “behind myths such as those of Orpheus and Herakles [sic].”⁶⁵ È dunque proprio la simbologia antifrastica che fa di Ercole/Eracle un eroe solare e insieme ctonio – “mediatore tra Urano e Gea”, lo definisce Durand –⁶⁶ a far sì che Hughes possa adattare il testo di Euripide in modo che entrambe le dimensioni erculee vi si trovino riunite in flagrante, e affinché l’una venga eufemizzata dall’altra. Così, se nel testo greco Eracle libera letteralmente Alceste dall’abbraccio della morte, nel rifacimento hughesiano lo fa solo dopo aver rivissuto appieno le sue imprese di “teratomachia”. La tragedia risulta per questo sconvolta nelle sue proporzioni originarie e notevolmente accresciuta con molte pagine dedicate al salvatore della regina, madre, sposa ed ennesima personificazione del femminile sacrificato, in questo caso immolata per amore del marito. Admeto è perciò ambigualmente causa dell’olocausto volontario di Alceste, dato che nel morire al suo posto la donna gli dona la vita e, per una volta nel macrotesto del poeta inglese, si fa ella stessa *pharmakos*. L’opera si presta così a rappresentare l’ultima, celebrativa, fase della visione hughesiana, in cui *Eros* e *Thanatos* sono più che mai allacciati e dove però alla forza amorosa e creatrice è garantito di oltrepassare la soglia e la caducità mortale. E senza dubbio, al di là delle eventuali colpe di Admeto (che Paduano colloca al centro di una

61. T. Hughes, *Shakespeare*, cit., pp. 313, 308.

62. Quello erculeo è, per esempio, anche un simbolo alchemico e, come tale, viene adottato in *Crow*. La morte dell’eroe per incinerazione evoca infatti la sublimazione ignea della materia (cfr. C.G. Jung, *Gli archetipi e l’inconscio collettivo*, op. cit., p. 315) e, in “Crowego”, è citata proprio in quanto cifra lustrale (cfr. T. Hughes, *Crow*, cit., p. 54).

63. Cfr., ad esempio, “Regenerations” [1964], in T. Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, cit., p. 58.

64. Cfr. M. Eliade, *Le chamanisme et les techniques arcaïques de l’extase*, Paris, Payot, 1964.

65. T. Hughes, “Regenerations”, cit., pp. 56, 58.

66. G. Durand, cit., p. 302.

“*communis opinio* [...] di consueto malevola”),⁶⁷ tanto l’encomio muliebre quanto poi quello della passione erotica e coniugale nel testo euripideo si adeguano perfettamente alla continua esaltazione del modello sponsale da parte di Hughes, da sempre ritenuto forma ideale di un’utopica unione degli opposti, umana e mistica, “a marriage in the soul”.⁶⁸

La vicenda della coppia regale sembra tuttavia fare da sfondo all’arrivo di Eracle nel palazzo in lutto e, soprattutto, alla scena madre in cui l’eroe ubriaco, accompagnato, diversamente che nell’originale, dai suoi uomini, Iolao e Lica, ripercorre con la memoria, e persino mima, in preda a un delirio confusionale, le sue gesta famose in quello che è il più ampio contributo di originalità dell’adattamento, tutto incentrato sul tema della lotta al teriomorfismo:

HERACLES:

Iolau, you are the lion.

[...]

Roar. Louder. The Nemean lion was mean.

Louder. No. Listen. I am the lion.

[...]

You be Heracles. Hit me with your club.

Heracles roars, chases Iolau. Maids scream and he chases everybody.

No, Iolau – you’re the lion and I am me.

And this is how I killed you.

He strangles Iolau, seems to tear lion skin off him, tosses body to Servants [...]

[...]

All of you – you be the heads of the hydra.

[...]

Lichas and Iolau organise all the Servants into a many-headed monster. Heracles grapples with it. [...]

IOLAUS:

Heracles grapples with the hydra

That rises from the mud of the magma

Out of which the round earth bubbled.⁶⁹

Nel tono inizialmente grottesco delle battute e delle azioni con cui Eracle rivive le sue due prime fatiche s’insinua da subito un contenuto più drammatico, richiamato dal gioco dello scambio ontologico orchestrato tra

67. Cfr. G. Paduano, “Amore e Morte”, in Euripide, *Alceste*, a cura di G. Paduano, Milano, BUR, 1993, p. 24.

68. T. Hughes, “The Environmental Revolution”, *cit.*, p. 129.

69. T. Hughes, *The Alcestis of Euripides*, London, Faber and Faber, 1999, pp. 49-50.

i personaggi umani, l'eroe e la *monstrositas*. Infatti, la confusione dei ruoli e l'ubriachezza evocano e anticipano i successivi rimandi intertestuali alla terribile pazzia che è argomento tanto dell'*Eracle* di Euripide quanto dell'*Hercules Furens* di Seneca. In preda ad essa l'"uccisore di mostri" avrebbe trucidato moglie e prole credendoli dei nemici, peraltro attaccando, secondo il Graves di *The Greek Myths*, anche lo stesso Iolao.⁷⁰ Viene così da subito insinuato il motivo dell'annientamento umano attraverso la distruzione della mostruosità, e l'interpolazione prosegue ancora a lungo inscenando il ricordo particolareggiato dei combattimenti dell'eroe e delle varie creature vinte, da "the Ceryneian hind" fino a "The Erymanthian boar", la quarta impresa a proposito della quale Eracle rammenta di aver "by horrible mischance / Wounded my dear old teacher, Cheiron".⁷¹ Il cenno al ferimento del centauro richiama ed enfatizza il tema dell'errore fatale nella lotta contro l'elemento teratologico, e insinua nelle parole e nel ricordo di Eracle un primo accento di confessione, destinato a erompere al culmine delle sue reminiscenze, che procedono dall'avventura di "The Augean Stables" all'uccisione di "the Stymphalian Harpies" e avanti fino all'undicesima impresa, ricostruita la quale esplode l'angoscia dell'eroe:

HERACLES:

I remember going down into hell.

[...]

Heracles seems to see a vision – gradually more horrified.

I hear the bleating of the dead

In the valley of death.

The dead flocking towards me.

The million, million, million ghosts

Swirling about me, with their tiny mouths.

Who am I looking for?

[...]

What was the play?

The madness of Heracles. Was that the title?

What did I do in that play?

[...]

I see my wife. I see my dead wife.

Who killed her?⁷²

La dodicesima fatica corrisponde tradizionalmente alla discesa all'Ade e alla cattura di Cerbero; tuttavia, per l'Eracle hughesiano l'inferno ricorda-

70. Cfr. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, cit., p. 100.

71. T. Hughes, *The Alcestis of Euripides*, cit., pp. 51, 52.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

to ha le sembianze di una moltitudine di morti in cui, con orrore, viene avvertita una presenza familiare, presto svelata dalla visione di Megara morta. In effetti, sia in Euripide che in Seneca l'eccidio veniva compiuto dall'eroe proprio di ritorno dall'avventura infera, così che nell'adattamento inglese il suo ricordo va quasi a coincidere proprio con l'ultima impresa compiuta. La memoria dell'uxoricidio si fa lentamente largo con una dinamica ancora una volta assimilabile a un "ritorno del rimosso" che Eracle non vuole pienamente riconoscere, evocando così – con una soluzione postmoderna inusuale in Hughes – il suo *Doppelgänger* letterario, più probabilmente quello senecano, data l'allusione di "the madness of Heracles" al titolo dell'opera latina. In ogni caso se, una volta risvegliatosi dalla sua follia, Eracle ripercorreva in Euripide le lotte vissute e definiva la strage con parole di tragica ironia – "Ecco, questa d' adesso è proprio l'ultima fatica mia, povero me" –⁷³ in Seneca l'eroe uccideva al culmine di un delirio di esaltazione in cui erano elencati tutti i combattimenti compiuti. Lo schema di *Alcestis* segue più o meno la progressione senecana e, infatti, la perdita di Megara si avvera nella mente dell'eroe in seguito alla tracotanza con cui sono state rievocate le dodici fatiche. Così facendo, Hughes non solo ricalca e richiama la tragedia latina, ma insinua nell'adattamento anche un rimando autoreferenziale a *Crow*,⁷⁴ in cui l'*Hercules Furens* rappresentava un modello per "Crow's Account of St. George",⁷⁵ un componimento in cui il patrono inglese e l'eroe greco venivano uniti nelle vesti di un moderno scienziato intento a recitare la "follia di Ercole":

He sees everything in the Universe
 Is a track of numbers racing towards an answer.
 With delirious joy, with nimble balance
 He rides those racing tracks. He makes a silence.
 He refrigerates an emptiness,
 Decreates all to outer space,
 [...]
 He melts cephalopods and sorts raw numbers
 Out of their dregs. [...]⁷⁶

Il delirio attribuito all'esaltazione scienziata della *persona*, la sua ricerca

73. Euripide, *Eracle*, in *Tutte le tragedie*, a cura di F. M. Pontani, Roma, Newton Compton, 1977, p. 332.

74. L'adattamento contiene ulteriori cenni autoreferenziali: Hughes vi materializza, e lungamente, l'episodio in cui Eracle uccide l'avvoltoio torturatore e libera Prometeo, ricostruendo così quel finale del mito che nel suo *Prometheus on His Crag* aveva voluto modificare e facendo rivivere all'eroe il ricordo dell'episodio come ennesimo atto "teratocida".

75. Cfr. K. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, cit., p. 122.

76. T. Hughes, *Crow*, London, Faber and Faber, 1970, p. 21, vv. 1-6, 9-10.

di una verità univoca, il suo smaterializzare e sublimare il mondo sensibile in astrazioni e cifre numeriche, corrispondono a una perversa cecità di fronte alla reale essenza delle forme vitali, che mai altrettanto chiaramente si rivelano demonizzate a causa di una proiezione abominante della ragione, la quale, dall'animalità trapassa all'umano:

He hears something. He turns –
 A demon, dripping ordure, is grinning in the doorway.
 [...]

 Bald, lizard-eyed, the size of a football, on two staggering bird-legs
 [...]

 Threatens. He lifts a chair – fear lifts him –
 He smashes the egg-shell object to a blood-rag,
 [...]

 Its belly opens – a horrible oven of fangs,
 [...]

 He stands trousered in blood and log-splits
 [...]

 [...] and runs dumb-faced from the house
 Where his wife and children lie in their blood.⁷⁷

L'esistenza del principio materno dietro le apparenze minacciose della mostruosità caotica e proteiforme è svelata drammaticamente e lo svolgimento dell'azione richiama quella dinamica distruttiva che Hughes aveva descritto, proprio a proposito di San Giorgio e il drago, come guidata dal terrore e dalla volontà della sua soppressione. Di diversa natura è invece il combattimento con la morte che attende infine Eracle, il quale, nel risolversi a salvare Alceste, simulacro di Megara, non solo si riscatta dall'uxoricidio commesso – pur non avendone forse compreso fino in fondo il significato – ma retrospettivamente redime anche i precedenti antieroi hughesiani, così come per esempio sembra suggerire, nel brano seguente, la nominalizzazione scientifica di “mesomorphs”, un possibile rinvio proprio a “Crow's Account of St. George”:

What good are my fancy labours –
 Strangling lions, beheading dragons,
 Pitching homicidal mesomorphs
 Out of their strutting careers.
 These are paltry work.
 [...]

 Every labour so far has served
 Only to prepare me for this.

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 22, vv. 12-13, 24, 27-28, 36, 42, 46-47.

Death has taken Alcestis.
 How if I were to wrench Alcestis
 Out of the grip of Death? [...]
 [...]
 Death will bend over her.
 He'll embrace her.
 [...]
 Then he will feel, as he bends there,
 My arms around his neck.
 If I'm too late, no matter.
 I shall go down through the earth –
 [...]
 I shall penetrate the palace of the God of Hell⁷⁸

In effetti Eracle affronta l'eventualità di una lotta con Ade alla stregua di un'ennesima prova eroica – anzi, la più gloriosa – e tuttavia, a differenza dei precedenti combattimenti, lo scontro non si profila come disconoscimento del femminile attraverso la sopraffazione della *monstrositas* e della sua vitalità minacciosa, ma idealmente, e a prescindere dalla sua effettiva realizzazione, come una *descensus ad inferos*, una catabasi, dunque come un accesso al reame morticolo. In altre parole, come un congiungimento con *Thanatos*. Detto questo, non ci sarà bisogno per l'eroe di penetrare fisicamente quella materia tellurica che sin dagli esordi del suo macrotesto atterrisce le maschere poetiche di Hughes, poiché la lotta contro il dio dell'oltretomba, avvenuta presso il sepolcro di Alcesti, corrisponde di per sé al recupero della regina dalle profondità sotterranee e ctonie verso le quali è scesa. Le qualità infernali non sono dunque più attribuite al femminile, che non solo è altro rispetto a “the God of Hell”, ma nel testo inglese è anche attentamente disgiunto dalla mostruosità. Infatti, se nel momento in cui l'eroe euripideo restituisce ad Admeto la moglie velata, questi pronuncia parole di dolorosa protesta nell'accogliere chi crede una sconosciuta – “Stendo la mia mano, come dovessi tagliare il capo della Gorgone”⁷⁹ Hughes capovolge la situazione, facendo recitare all'eroe “uccisore di mostri” quello che suona come un epilogo risolutivo rispetto alla sua lunga elaborazione della “teratomachia”: “Welcome your guest. Close her hand in

78. T. Hughes, *The Alcestis of Euripides*, cit., pp. 64-65. Cfr. Euripide, *Alcesti*, cit.: “Devo salvare la donna appena morta e riportarla in questa casa, per mostrare la mia riconoscenza ad Admeto. Andrò a spiare Thanatos, il signore dei morti nella nera veste, e conto di trovarlo vicino alla tomba, a bere il sangue della vittime. Quando sarà balzato dall'agguato e l'avrò afferrato e stretto nel cerchio delle mie braccia, nessuno potrà strapparmelo, dolorante ai fianchi, prima che mi abbia restituito la donna. Se poi fallirà questa caccia, perché non verrà alla libagione di sangue, scenderò alle case senza sole di Ade e Persefone, e la richiederò” (p. 125).

79. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

yours. / Look at her – you are not beheading a Gorgon / Who will turn you to stone.”⁸⁰ Eracle è così infine redento, anche se nell’adattamento permane un’ambiguità di fondo, non solo perché l’eroe continua a esprimersi nella lotta e non appare pienamente cosciente dei delitti commessi, ma soprattutto perché il riscatto di Alceste si dà come assunzione della *facies* amabile e benevola dell’elemento materno e femminile, e quindi come una sua ennesima riduzione. Dunque, se l’opera si adatta alle caratteristiche dell’ultima stagione hughesiana, al contempo, e ancora con il mitologema eroico, essa rilancia anche quella visione polemica che era più tipica del periodo mitopoietico.

80. T. Hughes, *The Alcestis of Euripides*, cit., p. 80.

REVIEWS

ROBERTA FERRARI

RASSELAS, PRINCIPE D'ABISSINIA

Review: Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas, principe d'Abissinia*, a cura di Giuseppe Sertoli, trad. di Goffredo Miglietta (Venezia: Marsilio, 2005), pp. 352, € 16.00.

“Ho già goduto troppo; dammi qualcosa da desiderare”: così il giovane principe abissino Rasselas si rivolge, nella bella traduzione di Goffredo Miglietta (p. 67), al suo precettore nei primissimi capitoli del *philosophical tale* johnsoniano, proposto in una nuova edizione curata da Giuseppe Sertoli per la collana “Letteratura universale” di Marsilio. La frase contiene *in nuce* il significato più intimo del racconto, che si dà quale parabola dell'inalienabile senso d'inappagamento insito nell'umana esistenza e stimolo fondamentale al viaggio, all'andare, alla ricerca del nuovo, del diverso, dell'altro da sé.

Proprio in ciò risiede, come rileva Sertoli nella sua Introduzione, “Il diverso e l'identico”, la modernità di un racconto che, al lettore contemporaneo, potrebbe risultare appesantito dalla fin troppo evidente intenzione didascalico-moralistica dell'autore e che invece si riscatta proprio nella sensibile registrazione di questo *Streben*, della tensione e del desiderio su cui la coscienza umana – Johnson parrebbe suggerire – si costruisce. Al vecchio precettore che lo ammonisce: “Signore [...] se tu avessi visto le miserie del mondo, sapresti apprezzare la tua condizione presente”, il principe significativamente replica: “Ora mi hai dato qualcosa da desiderare; bramo vedere le miserie del mondo, poiché la loro vista è necessaria alla felicità” (p. 67).

All'inizio della storia, Rasselas vive nella “valle felice”, luogo edenico in cui è relegato dal suo rango di principe reale. Insoddisfatto di una vita votata ad ozio e delizie, il protagonista decide di fuggire per conoscere il mondo esterno, sperando di trovarvi ciò che la valle non riesce ad offrirgli. Invano il poeta Imlac, che prima di lui ha viaggiato e conosciuto popoli e nazioni, lo mette in guardia sui pericoli dell'impresa:

Signore [...] la tua fuga sarà irta di difficoltà e, forse, potrai presto pentirti della tua curiosità. Il mondo, che ti figuri piano e tranquillo come il lago della valle, ti si paleserà in realtà un mare spumeggiante di tempeste e ribollente di gorghi: sarai talvolta

sommerso dalle onde della violenza, e talaltra scagliato contro i frangenti del tradimento. Fra torti e frodi, rivalità e ansie, bramerai mille volte queste dimore tranquille, e rinunzierai volentieri alla speranza per non albergare paura (p. 125).

Dalle sue esperienze di viaggio Imlac ha appreso una verità assai amara, che “[l]a vita umana è ovunque una condizione in cui vi è molto da sopportare e poco da godere” (p. 117). Rasselas non intende però rassegnarsi a quest’idea, animato com’è dalla sete di conoscenza e dalla bramosia d’avventura tipiche della giovinezza. Intraprende così il suo viaggio, accompagnato, oltre che da Imlac stesso, dalla sorella Nekayah e dalla favorita di lei, Pekuah. Allo spostamento fisico, che vede il principe e i suoi compagni attraversare spazi diversi ed entrare a contatto con figure disparate – dall’uomo saggio al romito, dal filosofo al Pascià, mescolandosi indistintamente con umili e potenti – corrisponde un percorso d’apprendimento, attraverso cui Rasselas arriverà a condividere la massima iniziale dell’amico poeta e a guardare con occhio disincantato all’esistenza sulla terra.

Ciascun episodio del romanzo – che secondo una prassi consolidata nella narrativa coeva si suddivide in brevi capitoli introdotti da un titolo con funzione enunciativa, caratteristica che rende la struttura, a detta di qualche critico, “episodic and aphoristic”¹ – esemplifica una differente manifestazione della natura umana, secondo il principio del “diverso nell’uguale”: cambiano dunque le coordinate dell’esperienza (la classe sociale, la professione, l’erudizione) ma non cambia la condizione di fondo dell’individuo. Ognuna delle figure che Rasselas e Nekayah incontrano sul loro cammino delinea quindi un tassello nel grande mosaico della natura umana che Johnson intende tracciare.

Da questo punto di vista egli è pienamente uomo del suo secolo, di quel Settecento che condivide l’idea di Voltaire, espressa a chiare lettere nel *Saggio sui costumi* (1756), secondo cui la natura umana è la stessa in ogni angolo della terra, a dispetto della diversità e varietà di usi e costumi. Ma la visione laicamente moderna del filosofo francese lascia posto, in Johnson, a un’idea della natura umana che fonda le proprie radici nella cultura classica e nell’ortodossia cristiana. Come sottolinea Sertoli:

Asserire che la natura dell’uomo è sempre la stessa in ogni tempo e paese significa, per Johnson, né più né meno che ripetere (com’è doveroso) la parola di una tradizione secolare. Quanto alla morale, non ce ne può essere che una sola: quella contenuta nelle pagine della Scrittura – ossia proprio quella “legge, caduta dal cielo, che insegna chiaramente agli uomini la volontà di Dio” su cui Voltaire aveva ironizzato nel *Trattato di metafisica* (p. 11).

1. D.J. Enright, “Introduction” to Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 12.

Ne deriva un libro di viaggio profondamente diverso dai resoconti contemporanei, un ibrido a metà strada fra l'apologo cristiano, il saggio filosofico e il genere, molto in voga ai tempi di Johnson, dell'*oriental tale*, diffusi in tutta Europa a seguito della pubblicazione della traduzione francese delle *Mille e una notte* (1704-17). L'esotismo, come ben illustra Sertoli, è per Johnson

al tempo stesso superfluo e indispensabile. Superfluo, perché dissimula appena i contorni di un "corpo" che è sempre e ovunque il medesimo. Ma indispensabile, perché proprio esso serve a dimostrare che, malgrado l'apparenza, *anche* il "corpo" dell'uomo orientale è simile a – anzi è lo stesso di – quello dell'uomo occidentale. Quel costume, in altre parole, deve essere trasparente ma non invisibile: un tessuto che vela e disvela, che evoca il diverso *per* negarlo lasciando trasparire da sotto l'identico (p. 21).

Il luogo del diverso si configura allora "come un non-luogo che esiste solo nella fantasia e nel desiderio" (p. 23), mentre l'esperienza del viaggio non fa che confermare il precetto scritturale del *nihil sub sole novi*. Non stupisce allora che l'avventura di Rasselas termini laddove è cominciata, con un ritorno che chiude il cerchio della narrazione e ci restituisce i protagonisti essenzialmente uguali a quando sono partiti, soltanto più consapevoli della loro "universale" umanità e dell'impossibilità di veder appagati i propri desideri, sia quelli da cui il viaggio è nato, sia quelli che da esso sono scaturiti. La chiusa dell'ultimo capitolo, significativamente intitolato "Conclusione, in cui nulla si conclude", rende conto di questa raggiunta "saggezza":

Dei desideri così concepiti, essi sapevano bene che non uno avrebbe mai potuto essere esaudito. Discussero un poco sul da farsi, e risolsero, quando l'inondazione fosse cessata, di far ritorno in Abissinia (p. 313).

ELSA LINGUANTI

SONETTI D'AMORE

Review: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonetti dal portoghese*, trad. con testo a fronte a cura di Biancamaria Rizzardi Perutelli (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2006), pp. 194, € 14.00.

Review: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Pensavo una volta come Teocrito cantò i dolci anni...*, a cura di Gaetano D'Elia (Bari: WIP Saggistica, 2006), pp. 72, € 7.00.

Escono, nel bicentenario della nascita, due traduzioni in italiano con testo a fronte dei *Sonnets from the Portuguese* di Elizabeth Barrett Browning per i quali si potrebbe ricordare la definizione di Heidegger di “poetry as a renovation of experience”. L'esperienza dell'amore incontra il protocollo di un canzoniere composto da 42 sonetti e, mentre evoca nel titolo della raccolta un altro amore mancato, come così spesso nella tradizione letteraria (il “Caterina to Camões” di Antonio Machado Papança), tratta invece dell'amore come epifania, e cioè rivelazione e scoperta, come dono e come reciprocità, infine come rapporto tra pari non soltanto in uno shakespeariano “marriage of true minds” ma in vera simbiosi.

Dei due volumi, uno è *Sonetti dal portoghese*, curato da Biancamaria Rizzardi Perutelli, per le Edizioni ETS, nella collana “Percorsi” del Dipartimento di Anglistica di Pisa. Alle traduzioni Biancamaria Rizzardi premette una “Presentazione” in cui racconta le vicende della vita, la vocazione poetica, l'impegno politico della Barrett, e fornisce gli elementi fondanti della raccolta di sonetti; seguono poi puntuali e accurate “Note di commento”, prima della esauriente Bibliografia.

Le note inseguono con impegno le riprese dalla tradizione poetica di forme e di immagini, di similitudini e metafore, e le citazioni, dalla Bibbia, da Teocrito e Orazio, Sofocle e Plinio, da Dante e Shakespeare, da Sidney, Spencer e Petrarca, da John Donne, Shelley, Wordsworth. La grande estensione delle letture della Barrett ne aveva penetrato a fondo l'intelletto e fecondata l'immaginazione. Si tratta di materiale mai inerte: non microelementi erratici ma accumulo di esperienze e acquisti spirituali, con cui i moti lirici dell'animo entrano in un rapporto che a volte è di collaborazione e a volte di scontro.

Perché è vero quanto Rizzardi sostiene e cioè che nella tradizione della poesia d'amore la Barrett si trova allo stesso tempo in nobile compagnia e sola, e ne è pienamente consapevole. Mentre inaugura il revival ottocentesco del canzoniere d'amore, il dialogo con l'amato dei *Sonnets from the Portuguese* cambia i ruoli tradizionali, perché è la donna-poeta a riprendere e trasfigurare i *topoi* della poesia d'amore tradizionalmente maschile. Per quanto sia insistita la nota della propria inferiorità nei confronti dell'amato, della differenza tra di loro ("Unlike are we, unlike, / O princely Heart!", III, "Diversi noi siamo, diversi, o principesco Cuore!"; "My cricket chirps against thy mandolin", IV, "Il mio grillo stride contro il tuo mandolino") si tratta di un dialogo da poeta a poeta.

Le poesie si susseguono scoprendo, studiando, narrando i processi mentali, emotivi, a volte quasi fisici, coinvolti nell'esperienza di un amore in cui la donna "Was caught up into love, and taught the whole / Of life in a new rhythm", VII, "Fui raccolta dall'amore, e tutta la mia vita / Cambiò ritmo", "e la poetessa è consapevole "of the new rays that proceed / Out of my face toward thine", X, "cosciente dei raggi che dal mio viso / Sprigionano verso te".

La poesia osa dire: "The face of all the world is changed" VII, "Ha mutato sembianze il mondo"; "thus I drink / Of life's great cup of wonder", XX, "Perciò bevo / Alla coppa colma di stupore della vita!"; "breathe within thy shadow a new air", XXIX, "E respirare nella tua ombra un'aria nuova"; "I find thee; I am safe, and strong and glad", XXVII, "Ti ho trovato: sono salva, forte e lieta".

Nelle lodi dell'amato la lingua non solo ne canta il principesco cuore, "o liberal / And princely giver", VIII, "generoso/ E principesco donatore", "noble like a king", XVI, "nobile e pari a un re", le labbra melodiose, il "calmly great / Deep being", XXV, "il tuo grande, tranquillo, / profondo essere!", il "broad heart", XXXVI, la "strong divineness", XXXVII, "la forza tua divina", ma ne accarezza le ciocche "di un nero purpureo", XIX, ne sente il calore: "thy touch upon my palm", VI, "la tua mano che tocca la mia", si scalda entro l'abbraccio, vi trova rifugio, riceve il bacio, un bacio che "upon my lips was folded down / In perfect, purple state", XXXVIII, "racchiuse le mie labbra, / Perfetto, purpureo".

Osa anche dire l'unità inscindibile degli amanti: "the enclasped hands", "mutual kiss", "mutual presence"; il condividere ogni cosa nella parità: "thy heart in mine / With pulses that beat double", VI, "il tuo cuore nel mio / Che per due pulsa e batte"; "Our two souls stand up erect and strong", XXII, "Quando le anime nostre stanno erette e fiere, / Faccia a faccia".

Si condividono anche gli attributi tradizionali, quando la donna sta co-

me colomba entro l'abbraccio di lui, ma anche la presenza di lui è "dove-like", oppure quando dal giglio tradizionale per la figura femminile si passa a "the lilies of our lives" XXIV.

La versione italiana, condotta con mano leggera e flessibile, suona con la grazia e la naturalezza felici di un linguaggio sempre attento a seguire la tensione emotiva e i sapienti ritmi dell'originale.

L'altro volumetto, *Pensavo una volta come Teocrito cantò i dolci anni...*, curato da Gaetano D'Elia per WIP Saggistica di Bari, è una serie di esercizi di traduzione di mani diverse, preceduta da una breve biografia dell'autrice e seguita da una Postfazione (Nota critica) e da una Nota di traduzione dello stesso D'Elia.

La nota di traduzione sceglie di commentare le difficoltà legate a sei riferimenti alla capigliatura che si incontrano nella raccolta: si vuol mettere in luce "l'eterogeneità dell'ispirazione poetica non esente da vere e proprie fumisterie". Accanto a quelli che D'Elia chiama "esasperanti stereotipi", i folgoranti inizi, come nel XIX, dove "quello che è forse il merito maggiore della Barrett" innesta particolari concreti – i commerci di Venezia – con memorie di Pindaro e le Muse, la gloria della poesia e lo scambio di riccioli tra i due innamorati.

D'Elia apprezza, al di là degli "avanzi di letteraria paccottiglia", "l'imperiosa vitalità" delle intrinseche qualità della poesia della Barrett: "le orchestrazioni, e le relazioni dei campi di immagini, le reti allusive, i 'riflessi prismatici', e i momenti in cui l'inventiva originale "spoglia il ragionamento d'amore di lacrimosa retorica". Trova anche gli ardimenti metrico-prosodici "più una sfida che un difetto e comunque anticipatori di una poesia a noi cronologicamente più vicina".

MARCO LASCIALFARI

DAL VITTORIANESIMO AL MODERNISMO

Review: Franca Ruggieri (a cura di), *Dal Vittorianesimo al Modernismo: La cultura letteraria inglese (1830-1950)*, Roma, Carocci, 2005, pp. 496, 31.50.

Franca Ruggieri, che per lo stesso editore aveva già curato *L'età di Johnson* (1998), si è ora avvalsa della collaborazione di un ristretto numero di specialisti per allestire un'antologia di testi letterari in inglese, con apparati in italiano. Prendendo in esame due grandi momenti, il Vittorianesimo e il Modernismo, e procedendo in senso cronologico, il volume presenta due introduzioni ai singoli periodi e un'antologia di brani, suddivisi per autore, preceduti da un cappello introduttivo.

Molti manuali e antologie spesso difettano di un quadro storico generale, indispensabile ad una piena comprensione dei movimenti letterari; in questo caso, invece, le due ampie sezioni introduttive al Vittorianesimo e al Modernismo illustrano in un discorso globale le sinergie e soprattutto i rapporti di causa-effetto che muovono la storia politica, sociale, religiosa, filosofica e letteraria, smascherando confini sottili e talora fittizi. Viene presentata una storia letteraria in movimento, in progressione nel tempo, da comprendere e valutare in un'ottica dinamica, in rapporto alla *history*, per cui si afferma che "La letteratura [...] è spesso diretta testimonianza [...] della storia" (p. 228).

Lo scorrere frenetico del XIX secolo è l'idea che investe tutta la trattazione del Vittorianesimo. Il processo di industrializzazione dell'Inghilterra e il relativo influsso sulla dimensione culturale in generale vengono individuati come cause prime di una complessa catena di cambiamenti. A un processo d'industrializzazione così rapido e fulmineo segue un ampio sviluppo delle infrastrutture, ad esempio la linea ferroviaria Manchester-Liverpool. Questo, a sua volta, favorisce lo sviluppo e la fioritura del commercio, anche Oltremanica, grazie ad una possente flotta mercantile che in questo periodo sembra avere l'egemonia sui sette mari. L'industrializzazione porta dunque ben presto ad un'intensa crescita della produzione e alla conquista dei mercati mondiali.

Varie le reazioni degli intellettuali, i quali rivelano comunque le contraddizioni e i tormenti della modernità: molti predicano l'abbandono dei sogni romantici in favore di un costruttivo impegno nella realtà contemporanea; per molti altri, invece, il prezzo da pagare per il primato nel commercio e nell'industria è troppo alto. Fondamentalmente, quindi, si avverte un forte senso di angoscia, a causa di un cambiamento così repentino: lo straniamento dal mondo, una realtà ormai alienata da una rapidissima rivoluzione tecnologica. La letteratura di questi tempi è testimone del forte disagio sociale, della fame e della miseria che proliferano soprattutto a causa della politica del *laissez-faire*; ad esempio, nel brano tratto da *Past and Present* di Carlyle si avverte una forte volontà di denuncia della società borghese, la quale risponde ormai ai soli "imperativi del successo" (p. 26) ed ha abbandonato ogni riserva morale, schiava dell'ossessione del fallimento sociale. Sono numerosi gli *industrial novels*, come quelli di Dickens e degli altri romanzieri sociali del suo circolo, qui rappresentati da Gaskell, Collins ed Eliot.

Come effetto dell'espansione commerciale e coloniale dell'Inghilterra, nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento partono le missioni per diffondere la fede cristiana. Molto vivido e in fermento il ritratto della situazione religiosa dell'epoca, dipinto nel volume, tra dibattiti razionalistici e utilitaristici, l'arrivo di Charles Darwin, con il suo *The Origins of Species* del 1859, e l'avvento, in conseguenza, del pensiero evoluzionista: una vera e propria rivoluzione che, andando ben oltre Religione e Scienza, investe tutto il pensiero occidentale. La teoria evoluzionista segna gli sviluppi successivi della storia delle idee, condizionando la ricerca scientifica, l'indagine filosofica e la politica, a ulteriore dimostrazione del cambiamento globale, della permeabilità dei confini tra le varie discipline. La stessa concezione materialistica della storia, proposta da Marx, equivale, nell'ambito delle scienze umane, alla scoperta della legge dell'evoluzione da parte di Darwin in biologia.

Questa spaccatura tra Religione e Scienza va ad aggiungersi alle tante crepe di fine secolo, come ad esempio la Guerra Boera e la questione irlandese, sulle quali si inizia a porre l'accento: fino a questo punto il testo vuol suggerire l'idea di un secolo che, pur tra mille contraddizioni, costruisce ed edifica qualcosa di serio e di importante; da qui in poi l'idea principale diventa invece la disgregazione di quanto è stato costruito. La serietà della progettualità politica e culturale vittoriana si incrina definitivamente negli ultimi anni del secolo: Oscar Wilde ridicolizza i valori, le certezze, le convenzioni, le manie vittoriane; la fede dei contemporanei nel Vangelo si incrina col Darwinismo.

Atteggiamento frequente della *fin de siècle* è la ricerca di nuovi elementi

formali nell'Edonismo e nell'Estetismo: nuovi colori, nuovi suoni, simboli e miti che interpretano, per un verso, la fine dei "sogni di onnipotenza" e la delusione critica per le certezze perdute, mentre, dall'altro, fissano la coscienza modernista del cambiamento: la sensibilità si esprime ora nel senso di perdita, nella malinconia, nell'"atteggiamento riflessivo di stanchezza" (p. 18). Da questo viluppo di frustrazioni e inadeguatezze ha origine la presa di coscienza del Modernismo, a cui viene dedicato un capitolo assai più breve, che prosegue però sulla falsariga del precedente, focalizzando ancora l'attenzione sui mutamenti notevoli e repentini di circa mezzo secolo di storia.

Con l'*Education Act* del 1870 sale il tasso di alfabetizzazione e, grazie anche alle numerose scuole di scrittura creativa, la letteratura diviene un mestiere per molti; ma si tratta spesso di un fenomeno di consumo, che produce opere prive di idee e spessore. Inoltre, la stampa condiziona fortemente i lettori, pubblicando le opere e le recensioni alle opere, orientando il gusto del pubblico. Questo crea un divario, che andrà ad allargarsi, tra artisti e lettori, dando vita al disagio dello scrittore, tema peraltro ampiamente trattato in *The Soul of Man under Socialism* di Wilde e in *The Day of the Rabblement* di Joyce (entrambi assenti nelle sezioni antologiche dedicate ai due scrittori); scompare lentamente la figura dell'artista organico rispetto alla propria epoca e alla società. È nel 1882 che viene finalmente riconosciuto alla donna il diritto alla proprietà, invocato un secolo prima dalla Wollstonecraft: fatto che avvia il processo di emancipazione e liberazione, passando attraverso le rivendicazioni della Woolf e l'acquisizione, grazie alle suffragette, del diritto di voto tra il 1918 e il 1928.

La Guerra Boera e la questione irlandese sono al centro dei dibattiti parlamentari e letterari: scrittori, stampa ed intellettuali ne discutono per tutta la prima metà del nuovo secolo. È proprio nell'ambito della buona società intellettuale, nelle conversazioni, nelle frequentazioni, che si manifestano nuovi ed importanti fermenti ideologici, ulteriori segni della necessità e della volontà di cambiare, di cercare, di rinnovarsi. È il caso del Bloomsbury Group, il quale, pur rifiutando, negli anni, qualsiasi formalizzazione sotto forma di manifesto culturale, suggerisce atteggiamenti nuovi ed indipendenti, spaziando da una sorta di agnosticismo tollerante al gusto per la discussione nella ricerca della verità, fino al disprezzo per qualsiasi convenzione intellettuale e morale. Si avverte una fortissima idea di *decadence* e, per contro, il desiderio di un nuovo inizio, accompagnato da una forte ansia di rinnovamento. Desiderio consapevole, tensione verso il cambiamento: è il *focus* della sezione; un mutamento invocato e ricercato intenzionalmente, che il testo sembra accostare di proposito e misurare per contrasto ed opposizione all'umanità travolta, sorpresa ed infine incredula

di sé, descritta nell'utile introduzione al Ventesimo secolo.

La mancanza di un impianto marcatamente didattico nelle due grandi introduzioni e l'andamento generalmente discorsivo rendono forse il testo inadatto al neofita; per chi si accosta per la prima volta a questi argomenti sarebbe stata auspicabile una suddivisione in sezioni diverse per le varie discipline (la storia, la filosofia, la politica, la religione, la sociologia), qui colte brillantemente in un unico, ampio sguardo onnicomprensivo. Per quanto esauriente ed eterogenea nella trattazione delle varie discipline storiche, la seconda sezione, introduttiva al Modernismo, risulta forse leggermente sbilanciata rispetto a quella sull'Età Vittoriana, a cui sono state dedicate maggiore perizia e attenzione.

Per quanto riguarda la trattazione dei singoli autori, il volume rivela talvolta una certa affettazione, sia nei cappelli introduttivi che nelle sezioni antologiche. Le parti che soddisfano meno sono quelle curate da Guido Bulla e da Carlo Bigazzi; ad esempio, l'introduzione a Thomas Carlyle, scritta da Bulla, parla di "risorse stilistiche virtualmente infinite" e di "scrittura eccentrica" (p. 26) come caratteristiche salienti dello stile dello scrittore scozzese, rintracciabili in opere come *Sartor Resartus* e *The French Revolution*. La sezione antologica, tuttavia, non prende in considerazione questi due romanzi; la scelta cade unicamente su *Past and Present*, peraltro ignorato nell'introduzione e dunque di difficile collocazione nell'evoluzione della vicenda artistica di Carlyle.

In alcuni casi i contenuti sono resi in una forma alquanto incerta; a proposito della Browning si legge che fra i lettori dei suoi *Poems* "figura certamente" il quasi sconosciuto Robert Browning, il quale "si scopre menzionato con approvazione" (p. 37) in *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*. Di Ruskin vengono sottolineate le qualità di scrittore poliedrico, di intellettuale dalla cultura "enciclopedica e versatile" (p. 114), poeta, autore di testi di botanica, geologia, estetica, critica letteraria, artistica e sociale, ma nella sezione antologica è presente un solo brano, tratto da *The Stones of Venice*. Delude anche la scelta antologica, ovvia e prevedibile, riguardante Dante Gabriel Rossetti, rappresentato infatti solo da *The Blessed Damozel*, il componimento più noto dell'artista preraffaellita. Non va meglio con la sorella, Christina Georgina Rossetti: su un cappello introduttivo di trentadue righe, ben ventisette sono dedicate alla vita della scrittrice, solo cinque ai tratti salienti della sua poetica. Il capitolo sui *War Poets* (anche questo curato da Bulla) è, invece, coinvolgente, efficace nel descrivere il dramma psicologico e morale affrontato dai soldati/poeti e piuttosto ricco nella proposta antologica. I nomi più importanti sono quelli di Sigfried Sassoon – di cui è riportata, tra le altre, la poesia *The Hero*, piena di "intensa e amara ironia" ma anche di "un profondo senso tragico" (p. 334) – e di Wilfred Owen, il

quale, con *Dulce et decorum est*, fornisce un'apocalittica descrizione delle "orrende visioni" (p. 336) legate all'esperienza della guerra di trincea.

Non molto convincenti le parti curate da Carlo Bigazzi; nel migliore dei casi si riscontra una asimmetria qualitativa fra le introduzioni, a volte esaurienti, e le sezioni antologiche, che presentano un numero assai ristretto di testi, generalmente uno soltanto per ogni scrittore. La trattazione di un autore importante come Dickens è piuttosto affrettata e lacunosa; la sezione biografica analizza i rapporti tra la vita privata e quella artistica dello scrittore, ma indugia forse fin troppo su *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, limitandosi ad elencare poi, in un brevissimo paragrafo, la produzione romanzesca. La poetica dickensiana, trattata separatamente dai romanzi, è illustrata in alcuni dei suoi aspetti principali, e risulta caratterizzata dal fascino perenne di una prosa che, con quella sorta di "garbata simpatia" (p. 72), coinvolge e rende complice il lettore. Lascia alquanto perplessi il ritratto a metà di un Dickens dipinto, qui, solo nella veste di attento osservatore dell'orientamento del gusto dei lettori, quasi di impiegato della letteratura; non si fa riferimento alla volontà dello scrittore di denunciare le ingiustizie e le miserie del suo tempo tramite la rappresentazione dei mali della società. La sezione antologica, assai scarna, si limita a proporre un brano tratto da *Hard Times*, e tralascia il resto della produzione dell'autore.

La prosa di Bigazzi, non sempre chiara, tradisce, a volte, una sostanziale fretta, presentandosi poco scorrevole, come, ad esempio nell'*incipit* del cappello introduttivo a Le Fanu: "Letterato, narratore, giornalista irlandese discendente da una famiglia di lontana origine ugonotta fuggita dalla Francia per motivi religiosi e approdata in Inghilterra. Come molti altri *refugees*, saldi nella fede ma scarsi di ricchezze personali, vengono consigliati di fermarsi in Irlanda" (p. 79). Scorrendo il paragrafo, si legge che nel 1844 lo scrittore sposa Susan Bennet, figlia di "uno dei più noti patrocinatori di Dublino" (*ibid.*). È probabile che per "patrocinatori" si intenda "avvocato", ma il dubbio obbliga a procedere per supposizioni, il che non è affatto auspicabile quando si vogliono dati certi, forniti in una forma chiara e comprensibile a tutti. Bigazzi aggiunge poi che, dopo varie peripezie, Le Fanu torna a dedicarsi all'attività di "estensore di racconti" (p. 79); quest'espressione ambigua può essere interpretata come una sferzata alla capacità torrenziale di Le Fanu di sfornare racconti, oppure come una semplice improprietà lessicale: per "estensore", si intende infatti il compilatore, il redattore, per lo più di scritti d'ufficio, che non impegnano l'autore a titolo personale. Tuttavia, se avesse voluto essere velenosa, l'espressione sarebbe stata scritta fra apici; così lascia invece nel dubbio che si tratti di un'improprietà lessicale.

Talvolta si riscontra un'eccessiva ridondanza nelle introduzioni. È il caso di Wilkie Collins: si legge che il romanzo inglese tradizionale doveva essere strutturato in circa 300.000 parole per essere accolto nei "famosi tre volumi, solidamente rilegati" (p. 85); questo commento risulta superfluo, così come gli aggettivi riferiti ai volumi, "famosi" e "canonici" (p. 86). Stona il sintagma nominale "il piccolo Bram" (p. 168), utilizzato per parlare del giovanissimo Bram Stoker, al posto di un più appropriato "il giovane Stoker". Raccontando poi di Vlad Tepes, voivoda valacco regnante fra il 1455 e il 1466, Bigazzi sostiene, in una forma priva di concordanza logica tra la frase principale e la secondaria, che Tepes fosse un individuo assetato di sangue, il quale però "si accontentava di vederlo versare, non di berlo" (p. 169). A proposito di *Dracula*, si legge che "Stoker, nello stendere l'opera fonda e amalgama più elementi" (p. 169). Può darsi che quel "fonda" sia un refuso, e che l'autore intendesse "fonde"; se così non fosse, si tratterebbe di un'ulteriore improprietà lessicale. Sorprendono anche (in negativo) certe scelte antologiche, a tratti scontate (come nel caso di Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, dove l'unica citazione proviene da *A Study in Scarlet*), a tratti illogiche: si ricordi quanto detto su Dickens, o si veda il capitolo su Wilkie Collins, in cui è delineata l'evoluzione stilistica che si verifica tra *The Woman in White* e *The Moonstone*, ma il raffronto non è poi riproposto nell'antologia, la quale si limita ad un brano tratto dal solo *The Moonstone*.

La letteratura femminile è, in buona parte, ben rappresentata e curata: i capitoli sulle varie scrittrici sono piacevolmente fruibili ed esaurienti. Merito soprattutto di Simonetta Faiola, che si occupa delle sorelle Brontë, di Elizabeth Gaskell, di George Eliot e di Katherine Mansfield. Un chiaro esempio della competenza della Faiola è riscontrabile nella parte dedicata alle sorelle Brontë: la biografia risulta infatti ben integrata dai riferimenti ai romanzi principali, dei quali, puntualmente, vengono riassunti il *plot* e le tematiche di base, e dall'antologia dei brani tratti da *Jane Eyre* e *Wuthering Heights*. Peccato non ci sia alcun brano dalla produzione di Anne. Di George Eliot sono antologizzati passi da *The Mill on the Floss* e da *Middlemarch*. Faiola (che si occupa anche di Wilde, G. B. Shaw, Hardy e D. H. Lawrence) possiede uno stile esegetico capace di mettere in luce, riassumendole, le varie sinergie tra la vicenda biografica e quella artistica di ogni scrittore. La scelta dei brani antologizzati è mirata a presentare le opere più interessanti e significative; la nota introduttiva ad ogni brano illustra le tematiche e riassume la trama dell'opera in maniera chiara e molto efficace. Singolare ed originale, nella trattazione di Thomas Hardy, la scelta di inserire *Hap*, un breve componimento tratto dai *Wessex Poems* in cui si esprime, riassumendola, quella "visione cupa e pessimistica" (p. 243) del-

l'esistenza che permea tutto il macrotesto hardyano.

Alla curatrice stessa, Franca Ruggieri, si deve il capitolo su Virginia Woolf. L'evoluzione artistica della scrittrice, ben delineata in senso cronologico nell'introduzione, è illustrata parallelamente nell'antologia, con brani tratti da *Modern Fiction*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* e *Orlando*. La Ruggieri rivela sempre notevole competenza nella trattazione degli autori da lei esaminati, come nel caso di Yeats e Joyce.

Roberto Baronti Marchiò cura molti scrittori, tra i quali Arnold, Tennyson, Robert Browning, Hopkins, Lear, T. S. Eliot e Auden. Le sue introduzioni poco concedono alla mera narrazione di vicende biografiche fini a se stesse (per le quali, infatti, ci sono le schede alla fine del volume), ed illustrano, in un linguaggio semplice e chiaro, le tematiche e gli stili degli scrittori. Interessanti e degni di nota i collegamenti e i raffronti tra i vari autori, sempre stabiliti da Marchiò con grande pertinenza.

La tendenza generale delle introduzioni è quella di presentare la cronologia (a volte confusa, altre più chiara) della vita e delle opere degli scrittori, illustrandone le caratteristiche stilistiche e le poetiche. Alcuni cappelli introduttivi tendono tuttavia a soffermarsi troppo sui dettagli biografici (spesso duplicati nelle schede bibliografiche collocate alla fine del volume) e illustrano in maniera generica le tematiche delle singole opere, come nel caso di Elizabeth Browning o di Bram Stoker. Le scelte antologiche sono, talvolta, scarse e incomplete; c'è però un gran numero di eccezioni che ne risollemano la qualità. In alcuni casi sarebbe stato preferibile un minore indugio sui fatti strettamente biografici ed una maggiore perizia e generosità nella scelta dei testi e dei brani da proporre al lettore. Le note ai testi, sempre piuttosto chiare ed esaurienti, sono collocate a piè di pagina; questo ne rende possibile la consultazione veloce ed immediata rispetto invece a quei libri in cui l'apparato delle note è posto a fine capitolo o volume. Le sezioni antologiche della Woolf e di Joyce sono stranamente prive di note; ma è, forse, una pia illusione attribuire a tutti i lettori di questo volume le competenze e il *background* culturale necessari alla piena comprensione dei vari brani.

Il volume appare, insomma, qualitativamente disomogeneo nella trattazione dei vari scrittori: a capitoli utili ed interessanti (che potrebbero giustificare l'elevato prezzo di copertina) se ne alternano altri, assai meno curati e non sempre esaurienti.

Risulta, inoltre, vistosamente assente una sezione dedicata a Henry James: americano, certo, ma considerato scrittore proto-modernista e maestro di Conrad, quest'ultimo invece presente, e a buona ragione, nel volume. Vero è che si tratta di un'antologia di cultura letteraria inglese, tuttavia, parlando di transizione al primo Novecento e visto che uno dei carat-

teri distintivi del Modernismo è proprio la sua dimensione cosmopolita, forse sarebbe stato il caso di allargare il discorso a James, e magari allo stesso Pound, visto che, come universalmente noto, i protagonisti del Modernismo inglese sono, prevalentemente, degli *outsider*, provenienti dall'Irlanda, dagli Stati Uniti e perfino dalla Polonia.

Le schede cinematografiche, assai curate nei particolari, si dimostrano utili a chi vuole estendere il proprio campo d'interesse alla stretta relazione fra letteratura e grande schermo; sono elencati quasi tutti i film (con i relativi *plot*) tratti dalla produzione degli scrittori raccolti nel volume, con l'attenzione spesso focalizzata sulle distanze che talora alcuni registi prendono dall'opera letteraria. Nella parte dedicata a Orwell è però vistosamente assente ogni riferimento a *Nineteen Eighty-Four* di Michael Radford, film inglese del 1984 con John Hurt, Richard Burton e Suzanna Hamilton. Inoltre, il discorso avrebbe potuto essere allargato ai film costruiti sullo scheletro di opere quali *Mrs Dalloway* (che ha anche ispirato *The Hours* di Michael Cunningham, da cui, nel 2002, è stato tratto l'omonimo film) e, soprattutto, *Heart of Darkness*, da cui nasce, nel 1979, *Apocalypse Now* di Francis Ford Coppola. Del resto, si pensi all'enorme debito che Coppola ha nei confronti di Conrad, come testimonia, fin dal titolo, il documentario su *Apocalypse Now*, girato nel 1991 da Fax Bahr e George Hickenlooper: *Heart of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*. La scheda relativa a Conrad è assai incompleta: nel 1977, l'esordiente Ridley Scott realizza infatti *The Duellists*, con Harvey Keitel e Keith Carradine, trasposizione cinematografica assai fedele del racconto *The Duel: A Military Tale*.

Le schede biografiche finali si limitano frequentemente alla duplicazione di informazioni già fornite nei cappelli introduttivi. Si notano anche alcune sviste: per esempio, riguardo a Conrad si legge che nel 1896 lo scrittore anglo-polacco sposò "Jessie Jones" (p. 452): in realtà la fanciulla in questione si chiamava Jessie George. Nella bibliografia, l'impostazione tipografica appare piuttosto confusa, poiché non viene usato il capoverso né per separare i vari titoli, né tantomeno per rendere immediatamente visibili le varie tipologie di testi elencati: opere; traduzioni italiane; bibliografia; biografia; monografie in lingua inglese; studi critici inglesi; contributi italiani.

Anche questa sezione lascia assai perplessi, talvolta a causa dell'inserimento di particolari inutili, talaltra, invece, per via dell'omissione di informazioni importanti. Ad esempio, non è ben chiaro quale interesse possa suscitare nel lettore il fatto che Ford fosse "un grande amatore" ed avesse anche "un numero cospicuo di concubine" (p. 458), pettegolezzo più adatto ad un settimanale di cronaca rosa che ad un manuale di letteratura per i licei e l'università. Sarebbe inoltre stato preferibile l'inserimento di elenchi più dettagliati delle opere specifiche di ogni singolo autore; alla voce

“Opere”, in realtà, si trova quasi sempre un rimando ai *Collected Works* o, addirittura, la generica indicazione che “le opere dell’autore sono reperibili in numerose edizioni *paperback*”. Il lettore interessato ai singoli lavori in stampa dovrà dunque rivolgersi altrove. Inoltre, è stato utilizzato il vetusto, e completamente inutile, criterio di indicare le sole città, omettendo l’editore. Per quanto riguarda poi gli studi critici in inglese e in italiano, il volume è ricco ed esauriente nella scelta dei titoli, ma sono stati tralasciati, ad esempio, gli importanti contributi di A. L. Johnson su Yeats, né viene menzionato l’utile *Fuori dal labirinto: Per una lettura di Ulysses* di Francesco Gozzi.

MARIO CURRELI

EPISTOLARIO CONRADIANO

Review: *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad: Volume 7, 1920-1922*, edited by Laurence Davies and J. H. Stape, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. lxxv+656, £ 80,00.

Dopo una attesa non eccessivamente lunga, considerata la vastità del materiale inedito qui raccolto, ecco un altro tomo – il quinto era apparso nel 1996, il sesto nel 2002 – di questa pregevolissima ed elegante edizione dell'epistolario conradiano. Il settimo tomo, dei nove previsti, è dedicato alla memoria di tre cari amici, tutti deceduti nella primavera del 2004: del nipote di Conrad, Philip, già Presidente della Conrad Society, di un decano degli studi conradiani come Bruce Harkness, e di Fred Karl, l'ideatore, quarant'anni fa, di questa colossale impresa, scomparso senza averne potuto vedere la conclusione. All'altro collaudato e sagace corresponsabile del progetto iniziale, Laurence Davies, si affianca in questo volume J. H. Stape, uno dei più attenti scopritori e scrupolosi indagatori di documenti originali connessi all'autore anglo-polacco.

Questo settimo volume, coprendo il breve arco di tempo che va dal 1920 al 1922, ci porta dal completamento di *The Rescue*, ultima parte della quadrilogia malese iniziata quasi un quarto di secolo prima, a quello di *The Rover* (il "romanzo mediterraneo" che uscirà nel 1923), passando per le varie riduzioni teatrali del romanzo politico *The Secret Agent*, una cui prima versione, in quattro atti, esce nel 1921 con scarso successo di pubblico, seguita da un rifacimento in tre atti nel 1923. Della stessa scarsità di successo di pubblico e critica soffrirà anche l'adattamento del racconto "Because of the Dollars", poi presentato sulle scene nel 1923 con lo stesso titolo, *Laughing Anne*, che aveva quando l'ultimo racconto di *Within the Tides* era apparso in America. Caratteristica saliente di questi adattamenti teatrali conradiani – accomunabili nella loro mancanza di successo, come ha ricordato recentemente David Lodge in *Author, Author*, ai lavori consimili di Henry James – è quella di essere allora usciti tutti separatamente in tirature limitatissime e di essere ora concupiti dai collezionisti. Destino simile a quello dei saggi apparsi in opuscoli *privately printed* della cui produzione e commercio si occupava con notevole profitto quel T. J. Wise, le

cui ormai note attività truffaldine in combutta con Clement Shorter, poi descritte da J. H. Stape nel corso di un congresso pisano, le *Ugo Mursia Memorial Lectures* del 1983, all'epoca non erano ancora state denunciate.

Il biennio coperto da questo settimo volume vede poi l'effettivo inizio di *Suspense*, l'altro atteso "romanzo mediterraneo" poi pubblicato postumo, nonché la stesura, insolitamente veloce, della sceneggiatura cinematografica *The Strong Man*. Quest'opera, tratta dal racconto "Gaspar Ruiz", mai portata sugli schermi e rimasta inedita in inglese, è apparsa finora soltanto in traduzione italiana, nel 1982, nell'edizione Mursia dell'opera omnia conradiana.

In questo stesso biennio di intensa attività – compreso negli anni "della speranza e della rassegnazione", come li ha definiti il biografo principe, Zdzisław Najder, nella nuovissima edizione riveduta, e appena uscita, della sua prestigiosa *Joseph Conrad: A Life* – oltre a completare la raccolta delle *Notes on Life and Letters*, Conrad scrive anche alcune prefazioni per libri di amici e colleghi, come le note introduttive per *A Hugh Walpole Anthology*, per *Landscapes of Corsica and Ireland* di Alice Kinkead, *At Sea with Joseph Conrad* del Capitano Sutherland, per *Into the East* del suo giovane ammiratore e agiografo Richard Curle, e persino per una raccolta di ricette culinarie di sua moglie, Jessie. La pubblicità editoriale riprodotta nel volume dell'epistolario descrive quest'ultimo libercolo, *Simple Cooking Precepts for a Little House*, come "containing all the hints and recipes which have made the Conrad home in Kent famous far and wide for the excellent quality of its cooking", anche se non mi risulta che nessuno degli ospiti dei Conrad abbia mai sottolineato l'eccezionalità di quella cucina; né ad essa hanno mai fatto riferimento i due figli dello scrittore, Borys e John, i quali invece hanno entrambi osservato come, appena l'incremento delle vendite dei libri lo permise, i Conrad assunsero una cuoca.

Joseph Conrad, questo schivo autore poco più che sessantenne ma già minato nel fisico e costantemente afflitto dalla gotta e da preoccupazioni finanziarie, vive isolato nella campagna del Kent, ma abbandona finalmente la quiete della bella casa di Oswalds, nei pressi di Canterbury, per una gita di un paio di mesi in Corsica (gennaio-marzo 1921), dove si documenta per il suo a lungo vagheggiato "romanzo napoleonico". Sull'isola celebra anche l'anniversario delle nozze d'argento con Jessie, ormai quasi completamente invalida, costretta a camminare con le stampelle e ingenerosamente descritta da Virginia Woolf come "a lump of a wife". Ora che ha accettato di diventare socio dell'Athenaeum Club, Conrad ne approfitta per farsi vedere ogni tanto in città, per visitare registi, produttori o agenti teatrali londinesi (come l'americano Joseph Henry "Harry" Benrimo, destinatario di alcune interessanti lettere inedite, fin qui del tutto sconosciute) e osser-

vare gli attori che provano gli adattamenti delle sue opere. Una foto, tratta da un giornale dell'epoca, e pubblicata fra le pagine 190 e 191, lo ritrae infatti seduto sul palcoscenico dell'Ambassadors Theatre, con il copione in mano, mentre Miriam Lewes, nella parte di Winnie, e Russell Thorndike (fratello della ben più nota Dame Sybil) in quella di Ossipon, provano una scena assai (melo)drammatica di *The Secret Agent*.

L'epistolario dimostra come le rare gite in città servano anche per andare a trovare editori e direttori di giornali e riviste, i quali, ora che è famoso, gli sollecitano collaborazioni; ma due di essi, William Heinemann, che stava allestendo, insieme a Doubleday, la imponente Collected Edition delle sue opere, muore nell'ottobre del 1920, mentre altri due vecchi amici e sostenitori finanziari, Lord Northcliffe, fondatore del *Daily Mail* e del *Daily Mirror*, e Sidney Pawling, socio dell'editore Heinemann, scompaiono nel 1922. A queste perdite si accompagna, sempre nel 1922, quella, assai più sofferta, del suo agente letterario, J. B. Pinker, a cui succede, ma non con pari affidabilità gestionale, il figlio Eric, destinatario anche lui di un gran numero di lettere inedite, delle quali si conoscevano soltanto alcuni stralci e qui raccolte nella loro interezza. Non a caso, questa catena di lutti spinge Conrad stesso a redigere le proprie ultime volontà nell'agosto 1922, e a nominare come esecutori testamentari Richard Curle e Ralph Wedgwood (pp. 502-503).

Una domenica di luglio del 1920, un altro tipo ombroso e riservato come Conrad, l'appena trentaduenne ma già leggendario Lawrence d'Arabia, va a trovarlo a Oswalds, e gli regala il caratteristico pugnale ricurvo degli arabi (che poi ho potuto ammirare in casa di Borys). Il giorno successivo, Conrad, scrivendone a Pinker, afferma "Col. Lawrence was delightful yesterday" (p. 143) e, da altra fonte, sappiamo che argomenti di conversazione erano stati l'archeologia e le Crociate. Un paio di anni più tardi, Conrad inviò a Lawrence una copia di *The Mirror of the Sea* con la dedica "Signed for T. E. Lawrence with the greatest regard by Joseph Conrad 1922" (p. 512).

Nell'agosto 1920 Conrad carica tutta la famiglia sulla nuova automobile, alta e traballante come una diligenza, per andare a trovare Rudyard Kipling, il Massone cantore dei destini imperiali della Gran Bretagna, più giovane di lui di una decina d'anni ma già da tempo insignito del Premio Nobel per la letteratura; per Natale riceverà una copia "charmingly bound" delle sue *Letters of Travel* (p. 229). Nell'inverno dello stesso anno Conrad accetta di posare per Max Beerbohm, il quale ne fa una caricatura altrettanto piacevole di quella, di altro genere, con cui ne aveva già esagerato la sintassi contorta nel parodico "The Feast", apparso nel 1912 in *A Christmas Garland*. In questa nuova caricatura, intitolata "Somewhere in the Pacific", si vede Conrad contemplare un serpente che sbuca da un

teschio, su una spiaggia deserta, con l'accompagnamento della scritta "Quelle charming plage! On se fait l'illusion qu'ici on pourrait être toujours presque gai!"

Altro avvenimento notevole di questo periodo è l'esecuzione, insolitamente completata in un paio di settimane soltanto, nel giugno 1921, della sua prima e unica traduzione dal polacco (e una delle pochissime da qualsiasi altra lingua) di *The Book of Job*, un lavoro teatrale del suo connazionale Bruno Winawer (pp. 323-325). Quest'ultimo avrebbe poi contraccambiato traducendo *The Secret Agent* in polacco (pp. 601-603) in collaborazione con Aniela Zagórska, una lontana cugina di Conrad, venuta a trascorrere qualche mese a Oswalds.

In questi stessi anni, oltre a continuare a vedere un piccolo numero di vecchi e cari amici e colleghi, come Cunninghame Graham, Edward Garnett, H. G. Wells e John Galsworthy, lo scrittore estende i contatti personali a pittori, scultori e musicisti, incontrando John Everett Millais (con il quale gioca a scacchi e al quale vorrebbe far illustrare *The Mirror of the Sea*), riannodando i rapporti con il "war artist" William Rothenstein, o conoscendo la paesaggista e ritrattista Alice Kinkead, oppure il compositore Maurice Ravel, presentatogli dal musicologo francese Jean Aubry. Quest'ultimo, per ora, si occupa di tradurne le opere sotto la direzione di André Gide, ma di lì a poco se ne autoproclamerà il massimo propagandista e "biografo definitivo".

Anche se non rivelano cambiamenti fondamentali nella poetica di Conrad, queste lettere ne confermano l'evoluzione in artista maturo e l'approfondimento della consapevolezza degli aspetti teorici della scrittura. Le reazioni di Conrad alle recensioni delle opere nuove, e delle sempre più frequenti ristampe di quelle vecchie, evidenziano la sua consapevolezza di un apprezzamento critico che si va facendo sempre più lusinghiero e pronunciato. Sensazione confermata altresì dal notevole e rapido accrescimento del numero di traduzioni di sue opere in altre lingue, specialmente in francese ma anche in italiano, con la comparsa della prima versione in assoluto nella nostra lingua: quella di Hilda Campioni di *The Idiots – Gli idioti* per la Harrap & Brentano's Bilingual Series, uscita a Londra e New York nel 1920. Conrad ama rivederle prima della pubblicazione, discutendone le soluzioni adottate con i traduttori, quali ad esempio Philippe Neel e Isabelle Rivière, e, nel novembre 1920, esegue lui stesso la versione inglese di "Joseph Conrad's Confessions" di Jean Aubry.

Le "Author's Notes" o "Prefazioni d'Autore" che Conrad, sull'esempio di quanto aveva fatto lo *cher maître* Henry James, ha iniziato a scrivere per le nuove edizioni o le raccolte complete delle sue opere confermano il continuo sviluppo della sua visione artistica, anche in relazione al dibattito con-

temporaneo sulla natura del Modernismo. Né mancano, in questo corposo volume, lettere nelle quali, da autore ormai affermato, Conrad difende, davanti a editori e agenti, la scelta del titolo o l'organizzazione interna delle riedizioni di racconti, o nuove raccolte di saggi, che escono nel 1921 in Inghilterra (*Notes on Life and Letters*) o in America (*Notes on My Books*).

Questo autore ormai affermato e largamente apprezzato continua tuttavia a provare l'angoscia della pagina bianca, da riempire in fretta per ottemperare alle richieste pressanti degli editori o dei direttori di riviste, che gli chiedono di rispettare le scadenze della consegna di nuovi capitoli o saggi, e prova una soddisfazione esaltante quando può finalmente annunciare l'invio di un manoscritto, o licenziare una bozza corretta.

Come nel caso dei precedenti volumi, soltanto una piccola percentuale di queste lettere era già nota attraverso le edizioni parziali e difettose di Jean Aubry o di altri curatori (vengono citate ben cinquantasette diverse fonti a stampa in libri e in periodici), ma qui le lettere completamente nuove (tratte da una settantina di archivi pubblici e raccolte private) costituiscono tre quarti del totale. Anche in questo volume tutte le lettere sono state riscontrate sui manoscritti o dattiloscritti originali; quelle scritte in lingue diverse dall'inglese sono state nuovamente tradotte, e tutte sono state annotate succintamente ma esaurientemente e in maniera impeccabile dai due affidabili curatori.

Negli apparati che precedono il corpus delle lettere, il volume, arricchito da otto illustrazioni fuori testo, è corredato da ventiquattro pagine nelle quali i due esperti curatori richiamano alcune notizie essenziali sui corrispondenti principali, già ampiamente rappresentati nei volumi precedenti, ma anche su quelli decisamente secondari, come Clarence E. Andrews, un docente e viaggiatore americano che gli aveva dedicato un suo libro sul Marocco (pp. 412-13). I curatori sono stati costretti a lasciare senza alcun dato bio-bibliografico soltanto due o tre illustri sconosciuti, per la maggior parte ammiratori, come un Mr Blodgett, che aveva invitato Conrad ad andare in Oklahoma (p. 12), o un non meglio identificato Dr A. Knaur, il cui nome sulla busta poteva anche sembrare Kranz (p. 66), oppure recensori di testate minori, che avevano mandato a Conrad un ritaglio dei loro articoli, e ai quali lo scrittore non mancava mai di indirizzare due righe di ringraziamento.

Anche in questo settimo volume Conrad si presenta in una grande varietà di atteggiamenti, passando da quello divertito e scherzoso – come quando invita a pranzo Bertrand Russell, il quale aveva invece avuto l'impressione, erronea, di non essere gradito (p. 349) – allo humour nero, se non a un tono decisamente disperato, come quando sceglie per epigrafe di *The Rover* quei versi di Spenser che poi verranno incisi sulla sua lapide

tombale. Come nota opportunamente Laurence Davies nella sua introduzione “Can’t that touching quotation from the *Faerie Queene* gracing both *The Rover* and Conrad’s grave also be taken as the voice of Despair?” (p. xxvii). In parallelo, scorrendo queste lettere, vediamo l’autore muoversi facilmente da un registro linguistico all’altro: dai toni amichevoli e rilassati con i vecchi amici (“Mon cher ami”, “Cher Jean”, “Dearest Jack”, “My dear Richard”) a quelli profondamente commossi (come quando risponde a un insegnante di Newark che voleva erigere un monumento al vecchio amico Stephen Crane, p. 349), oppure decisamente asciutti, come quando si rivolge a Ford Madox Ford chiamandolo “Dear Hueffer” (ben sapendo che l’antico collaboratore aveva invece anglicizzato il cognome tedesco durante la prima guerra mondiale), o quando (pp. 213-214) declina l’invito di Elsie Hueffer a riallacciare i vecchi rapporti, o anche freddamente formali, come quando risponde seccamente a un tale Mr Frisbee che aveva criticato la disposizione del carico sul *Narcissus* (p. 218). Il tutto nell’apparente consapevolezza di stare scrivendo per i posteri, poiché certamente Conrad non ignorava come, diversamente da lui che cestinava anche le lettere di autori e personaggi illustri,¹ gli amici ne conservassero tutte le missive, con l’intenzione di stamparle, come poi è effettivamente avvenuto, subito dopo la sua scomparsa, in una serie di volumi separati, con trascrizioni spesso parziali e non immuni da inesattezze e refusi, qui finalmente emendati.

Volumi splendidamente curati come questo, unitamente agli ultimi due ancora in allestimento presso la Cambridge University Press, continueranno a rivelare, tanto allo studioso quanto al lettore comune, una personalità poliedrica, accattivante e complessa, che, al pari di Lord Byron, Dickens, Gissing, Lawrence e Joyce, si va dimostrando come uno dei più interessanti, prolifici e godibili epistolografi dell’Otto e Novecento.

1. Spesso recuperate da Jessie nel cestino della carta straccia, oppure sopravvissute perché trasmesse dallo scrittore agli editori o inoltrate all’agente letterario con preghiera di far spedire copie omaggio dei suoi libri agli ammiratori, le non molte lettere superstiti fra quelle inviategli da scrittori importanti come Gissing e James, Wells e Garnett, Crane e Rothenstein, Galsworthy e Gide, o da personaggi minori, sono state raccolte in un numero speciale di *The Conradian*, poi riedito a parte come *A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad*, a cura di J.H. Stape e Owen Knowles (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996). Successivamente ho pubblicato io stesso gli scambi epistolari con Cecchi e Marcellini, ma dove sarà, ad esempio, finita l’ovvia risposta alla lunga lettera dedicatoria a Conrad premissa da Conal O’Riordan (alias Norreys Connell) al suo *Shakespeare’s End and Other Irish Plays* del 1912? Apparentemente non si trova fra le carte del drammaturgo e romanziere irlandese conservate nella Morris Library di Carbondale

Laura Giovannelli

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE SHORT STORY

Review: Angelo Righetti (ed.), *Theory and Practice of the Short Story: Australia, New Zealand, The South Pacific* (Verona: Università di Verona, 2006), pp. 284, n.p. given.

An ambitious and wide-ranging study, this collection of interviews, essays and discussions on the short story – an unfairly marginalised genre and rich repository of potentialities – compellingly brings home to the European reader some fundamental stances concerning postcolonial modes of writing and their figuring out of a socio-cultural as well as aesthetic identity.

As the editor, Professor Angelo Righetti, points out in his Introduction, the volume collects the proceedings of a colloquium held at the University of Verona in the spring of 2004, and is meant “as a celebration of the creative efforts of short story writers and scholarly research” (p. VII). It gets together “the contribution of writers ‘in conversation’ with internationally acknowledged scholars and critics (Laurie Hergenhan, Bruce Bennett, Lydia Wevers, Claudio Gorlier)” and a series of papers “read after the writers’ conversations and presentation of their work” (*ibid.*).

Bearing the marks of a sparkling dialogic confrontation are both the first section of the book, composed of four “conversations” and a “performance”, and the closing Panel Discussion, which boldly challenges time limits, national and textual boundaries (as announced by the subtitle “Past, Present and Future of the Short Story in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific”) and aptly crowns the work by means of a final *vis-à-vis* between scholars and creative writers. The ambiguous feeling of wavering confidence and discomfort which, all in all, pervades this appendix is not simply in tune with the encompassing chronological and geographical frames featured by its subtitle, but it also springs from an entire body of crucial questions here pushed to the fore, that is the somewhat received idea of the short story as ancillary to (and a training ground for) the novel; the “whims” of the market policy and the publishers’ reluctance to place stories written by as yet unknown authors or, conversely, the launching of projects and magazines aimed at “safeguarding” the wellbeing of short fic-

tion; the break from traditional realism and the remarkable changes brought about by the media and technology (namely, the net); the dwindling readership and the artists' scant royalties; the hoped-for role of universities in maintaining literary appreciation alive.

To get an idea of the debate, one may just keep in mind Kate Grenville's opening comments and Frank Moorhouse's conclusions:

K. GRENVILLE [...] it seems to me that in Australia there is some sense that the short story might be an exhausted genre, that it has gone into the extremes of post-modern playfulness to the extent that it has lost all sense of content. I don't know if this is true, but I think that's one perception, and it has seemed to me, listening to everything that has taken place here over the last three days, that on the contrary, the Australian short story has in front of it a grand future, a future which is indicated by our neighbours. It seems to me that they are so far ahead of us in using this genre, as a means of entering the postcolonial project, and we haven't even begun that, I think we're still in the pre-postcolonial stage, and what I will take away from this colloquium is the realisation that there are still things to be done with short fiction in terms of relating to, or leaving behind, our colonial past and also avoiding our present, as the present colonisers (p. 265).

F. MOORHOUSE Yes, I have no regrets about the death of the short story, of what we used to call the commercial short story which we've always scorned in a sense for being glib and shallow and in some ways resembling the types of journalism that has taken its place. The commercial short story is gone, and it went in the 1960s-1970s probably gradually [...] our main job of a writer these days is to negotiate with the public and the private sectors for the resources to do what we want to do. And this is a continuous negotiation that goes on, unless you really make it big, say through a film or through a best-seller, but essentially the literary tradition is that you negotiate with the private and public sectors for the resources to do what *you* want to do, not what they want you to do (p. 283).

In other words, the supposed "death of the short story" or its status as an "endangered species" should be seen as an almost physiological path towards resurrection through negotiation, metamorphosis and renewal.

Lending considerable weight to short-story writing are, on the other hand, its deep connections with orality, local cultures and, as claimed by Sia Figiel – a Samoan painter, poet, performer and actually the first contemporary woman novelist from the Pacific Islands – its "naturalness" and practicability: to her, thinking in short stories is "something I grew up with, constantly hearing that music, different songs strung together" (p. 270). At the same time, Figiel resumes Virginia Woolf's *tópos* of "a room of one's own" to underline how difficult it can be for a South Pacific female author (not to say for a mother) to carve out a space for artistic expression. The short story appears thus to gain more and more ground since it "takes less time as opposed to sitting down and writing a novel. It's almost like a

joke, growing up in a communal society” (p. 271).

What we happen to come across here is one of the main topics of the book: the prismatic quality of the short story, which arguably no theory manages to channel into a permanent aesthetic category. Both a “natural” narrative mode and a piece of craftsmanship, a dead genre and an almost unexplored mine, an apprenticeship process and an accomplished work of art, it continues to defer any thorough and systematic description. Yet, when considering the cultural differences and peculiar features which characterise postcolonial literature – namely the output relating to Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific – we soon realise that the resistance to labelling, alongside the effort to overcome stereotypes, is a distinguishing mark of the artists themselves, who experience a sort of two-way pull between Western-like claims of “individuality” and a sense of communal belonging, a pride in ancestral traditions and the appeal of a “world culture”.

All this strengthens the case for viewing the short story as a pliable and, so to speak, “taboo-breaking” tool (p. XI), capable of addressing a multifaceted, if not fragmented, audience and of branching beyond any fixed boundary (be it in gender, politics, ethnic groups or social codes). Global assimilation is therefore countered by prospects of reconciliation between settlers and natives and by an attentive charting of hybridity within often bilingual communities where, say, Maori rituals and lore set the framework for an “indigenising” of English culture and language. Put differently, the process of “writing back” to the Empire seems to be anything but exhausted, though eschewing romance, sentimentalising and didacticism.

Both committed and ironic, expanding upon commentaries on the texts, autobiography, literary and political beliefs, the four conversations of Part I involve (as authors and interviewers) Australian Frank Moorhouse and Laurie Hergenhan, Australian Kate Grenville and Bruce Bennett, Maori Patricia Grace and Lydia Wevers, Pakeha Bill Manhire and Claudio Gorlier. Being in many ways versatile personalities who have tried their hand at journalism, film editing, painting and teaching, the writers mentioned above are not afraid to talk, occasionally tongue-in-cheek, about their careers, failures, models or the obstacles they have been meeting with, so that the discussions fall hardly wide of the mark. Some blunt statements by Grenville offer quite an insight into this, with reference to her experimental and “angry” feminist collection *Bearded Ladies* (1984):

KG [...] *Bearded Ladies* is written out of a kind of red-hot rage that this was the life that was being offered to me. Fortunately by the time I was writing *Bearded Ladies*, feminism was happening, just in time, thank goodness. So, what I was recording I think was the world out of which feminism had to happen, the world had to change

[...] it was as if certain awful medicines had to be swallowed in order for you to get beyond them. You have to go through a period of looking in the face this most horrifying prospect of your life as a corseted woman in order to move beyond it (p. 28).

A dramatic need to let the “silenced” speak can also be detected in Patricia Grace, the first Maori woman writer who, admittedly, feels ill at ease with such an alleged literary supremacy, “because there were so many important works before that [my book *Waiariki*] but there was also a whole legacy of work in Maori that may not have been written but there were songs, there were chants, there were compositions” (pp. 42-43). A coterminous and controversial issue laid bare in the interview is Grace’s political choice to have her Maori characters *naturally* speak Maori, with no glossaries or translations assembled in a paratextual appendage: the point that she watertightly presses is a refusal “to treat Maori as a foreign language in its own country” (p. 46).

Sia Figiel’s enthralling reading from two of her novels – a performance taking place in a closed-up room as a tribute to the ancient Samoan custom of telling stories at night – constitutes a welcome interlude before dense Part II, where postcolonial literature and questions are given further poignancy by the scholars’ eleven papers, showing a range of critical approaches along with an emotional participation in the authors’ tasks and a sympathetic understanding of their painstaking efforts towards expression.

Carla De Petris concentrates on protofeminist, emancipated Mary Chavelita Bright, *alias* George Egerton (1859-1945), a writer of sexually daring stories, who eventually joined “The Yellow Book Circle” and was endowed with an amazing variety of cultural identities, besides a mixed background (born in Australia, Egerton was of Irish and Welsh descent, and lived in New Zealand and Europe too). Annalisa Pes similarly studies the representation of women who, in spite of threats, humiliations or downfall, stand their ground against tyrannical patriarchal rules in Australian Henry Handel Richardson’s (1870-1946) and Kate Grenville’s production, where constricting (gender-marking) clothes turn into an epitome for the taming and punishing of female “rebels”, while travelling experiences symbolise both escape and a free exploration of the self.

If Angelo Righetti meticulously reconstructs the dialectic between the idea of continuity (as exemplified by the thematically and semantically interwoven tales in the collections analysed) and the traits of discontinuity (connoting each text as a self-contained entity) in Frank Moorhouse’s *oeuvre*, Daniela Carpi delves into the metafictional playfulness and short-circuiting of logic in Bill Manhire’s *South Pacific* (1994). She casts light on, among other things, the book’s “factions” and ironical undermining of adventure tales, Western myths and island-shipwreck archetypes like *The*

Tempest, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Lord of the Flies*. When talking about “Cannibals”, a story in which the primitives’ leader is mockingly called Jules Verne and the “civilised”-“uncivilised” dichotomy undergoes a blatant deconstruction, she gathers that the narrator’s “message is that no one can say who is teaching what and whom” (p. 155).

Rita Di Giuseppe and Chiara Battisti keep on tracking down creative and subversive borrowings from Western cultural tradition. The former vividly brings to life the connections established by Australian Amy Witting’s (1918-2001) poetry and short stories with Lord Byron’s *Don Juan*, Guy de Maupassant’s and Anton Chekhov’s works, and foregrounds Witting’s authorial self-consciousness, unmasking of hypocrisy, cries against political tyranny, loneliness or conformist behaviour, as well as her penchant for sketching in “private conversations” with fellow artists. Battisti sets out to sound the presence of Bluebeard’s fairy tale in New Zealand-Australian Jane Campion’s *The Piano* (1993), the well-known film centred on dumb Ada’s physical and spiritual journey from the constraints of patriarchy – embodied by her British father and, notably, her Bluebeard-like white husband – towards a union with the compassionate, far-sighted, hybrid subject: tattooed Baines, a Pakeha “initiated” to the Maori world. The critic’s accent is placed less on the intertextual legacy than on Ada’s unfathomable character and resistance; on the piano as a metaphor for both her “unvoiced voice” (p. 166) and the bulk of English culture; on the sea imagery and masterly scenes of the film, as opposed to its somewhat flat “novelization” by Campion herself and Kate Pullinger (*The Piano, a Novel* [1994]).

Language is the main research field of Susanna Zinato, who persuasively investigates the momentous and even existential significance acquired by fear, language and/or silence in New Zealand Janet Frame’s sketches and short stories, especially “The Terrible Screaming” (1962), imbued with a Kafkaesque concern with alienation, guilt, incommunicability; Marta Degani, who refers to Mikhail Bakhtin’s and Homi Bhabha’s theories to flesh out the linguistic-cultural hybridity informing Patricia Grace’s stories, where the idea of an “organic” intermingling of races and idiolects (with all their lexical and morpho-syntactic specificities) is variously played off against an “intentional”, ideologically-oriented division between Pakehas and the jeopardised Maori group. Anna Zanfei finally deals with the linguistic and stylistic experiments carried out by Samoan Albert Wendt in “Captain Full” (1974), a short story in which the writer can be shown to “indigenise” English via South Pacific variants, pidgin “migrations” and semantic reversals of Western clichés.

The last two papers of Part II provide the reader with further intellectu-

al *stimuli* regarding, on the one hand, Tongan writer and anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa, whose *Tales of the Tikongs* (1983) are perceptively surveyed by Maria Teresa Bindella in a commentary that never loses its grip on the political implications inherent in the author's deflating of the "belittlement" of Oceania on the part of a centralising Empire. If Bindella focuses on the crucial inverting of our prejudiced concept of the Pacific as "islands in a far sea" into the indigenous experiencing of a vast and interconnected "sea of islands", on the other hand Yvonne Bezrucka critically unweaves the threads of anthropology, physiognomy and canonised aesthetics to advocate the notion of regional standards of beauty (or the "aesthetics of the characteristic", p. 248), in contrast with the assumed superiority and universality of Greek ethnic types. Her approach to Wendt's collection *Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree* (1974) is underpinned by a deep awareness of racist-biased taxonomies of peoples, individuals and outward appearances backed throughout the centuries. Bezrucka ultimately argues for an autocthonous "grammar" where tattooed bodies may well achieve aesthetic primacy and, in Wendt's words, grow into "defiant texts or scripts of nationalism and identity" (p. 249). That would be a promising, substantial promotion of a counter-scenario.

VIKTORIA TCHERNICHOVA

UNA DIAGNOSI DEL ROMANZO GLOBALE

Review: Stefano Calabrese, *www.letteratura.global Il romanzo dopo il postmoderno* (Torino, Einaudi, 2005), pp. 286, € 19.00.

Studio culturale delle vicende del romanzo contemporaneo, il lavoro di Stefano Calabrese si presenta come un'indagine attenta dell'avventura del genere romanzesco negli ultimi vent'anni, dopo la fine, per autofagia, del romanzo post-moderno. *www.letteratura.global Il romanzo dopo il postmoderno* presenta due capitoli dedicati ad un "Antefatto: il "romanzo totale" della modernità" seguiti da "Dal postmodernismo al 'global novel'", e da cinque capitoli dedicati a Stephen King, Don DeLillo, Michael Crichton, Isabel Allende e Salman Rushdie, "case-studies che riguardano autori assai noti", nati intorno agli anni Quaranta, "non necessariamente apprezzati dallo scrivente, più interessato al loro grado di esemplarità" (p. viii).

È fondamentale tenere presente l'asserzione di Calabrese il quale, nonostante riconosca una "egemonia simbolica della letteratura" che le consegna tuttora un ruolo incontestabile (p. 57), si ritiene anche certo che "oggi non sarebbe più possibile classificare lo spazio letterario in un comparto basso e uno alto" (p. 59). Il romanzo sta dunque soltanto come "umile famulo, il portavoce di un intrattenimento globale" (p. 68). È chiaro, quindi, che lo studio non si occupa della specificità del linguaggio letterario come forma d'arte ma dell'esemplarità dei testi prescelti, a sostegno di ipotesi forti di tipo socio-storico-antropologico.

Se nell'Ottocento il romanzo ha cercato e consolidato l'equilibrio tra individuo e società, all'inizio del Novecento si trova a dover sopravvivere in un habitat fortemente ostile alla parola (p. 25): la sua "flessibile, totalitaria struttura morfologica" non poteva sopportare i sismi epistemologici del Novecento (p. 21). La modernità ha visto l'esproprio del soggetto e la nascita del "romanzo totale" sino al suo declino. *Double coding*, metanarratività, intertestualità, decostruzionismo, ipertesto sono i termini critici che accompagnano una "letteratura dell'esaurimento" nel postmodernismo, con personaggi comatosi che "patiscono di inesistenza mentre sono ancora in vita" (e qui l'esempio è Borges), soffrono di vertigine epistemologica

(John Barth), esposti a una *mise en abyme* con duplicazione all'infinito (Georges Perec).

Calabrese battezza *global novel* il romanzo sopravvissuto alla propria morte: contro la diminuita accessibilità simbolica del reale è forte il “bisogno di negoziazioni discorsive che ne ripristino la coerenza” (p. 47). Subentrano testi che sono “romanzi-cosmografie” (p. 48) in una generale “detemporalizzazione dello spazio sociale” (p. 56): gli individui si staccano dal corpo etno-sociale di appartenenza, la cultura si fa collettore di dati frammentari e di diversa provenienza, l'agire umano “consegue all'assunzione di un guscio identitario provvisorio”, la coscienza è un “inutile orpello per il nuovo Sé globalizzato, gelatinoso e modulare” (p. 55). Il termine che Calabrese adotta per riassumere i mutamenti in corso nel romanzo mondiale è *olofilia*, cioè “pulsione a vedere porzioni estese e interrelate di territori conoscitivi”: la letteratura è una “calotta voltaica di scambi a distanza in cui prendono corpo schemi procedurali, opinioni comuni, patriottismi costituzionali, [...] e l'inserimento di discontinuità culturali entro un'effettiva continuità naturale” (p. 57).

Quando da qui si passa ai *case studies* scelti, e la rappresentatività è attribuita ai *best-sellers* (con precisa citazione degli impressionanti numeri di copie vendute), diventa chiaro che l'indistinzione dichiarata necessaria tra “basso” e “alto” per lo spazio letterario odierno paga i suoi costi. “Il successo di pubblico” scriveva Francesco Orlando nella sua *Lettura del Gattopardo (L'intimità e la storia, 1998)*, “fa del romanzo, insieme con *Cent'anni di solitudine* e senza il fattore erotico di *Lolita* o politico del *Dottor Zivago*, uno dei tre o quattro libri del secondo Novecento che hanno travolto su scala mondiale lo sbarramento tra capolavori e masse” (p. 10). Ciò vale per il caso-Rushdie che nel libro di Calabrese si trova, in una “indistinta, globale pangea letteraria” (p. 224), affiancato a prodotti di consumo come i romanzi di Stephen King e Michael Crichton, di una scrittrice come Allende, formatasi in un contesto storico-sociale “contraddistinto da dosi massicce di *telenovelas* ad elevata tossicità genealogica” (p. 186), di DeLillo con i suoi estenuati personaggi “*dossier'd up*, cioè prigionieri del codice epistemico” (107), oltre che al caso-Rowling (nella “nursery letteraria”, Saleem Sinai è a fianco di Harry Potter, p. 223) e ad un genere di “romanzo *crossover*, translocale e pangenerazionale usufruibile ovunque e da tutte le classi di età” (p. 224).

L'onestà metodologica di Calabrese conduce analisi brillanti nelle quali la de-temporalizzazione dello spazio sociale e l'organizzazione transmediale della strapotente industria editoriale esercitano azione patogena sulla figura dello scrittore nei testi di Stephen King. Il processo di ristrutturazione globale della cultura provoca la deriva ipersemanantica di un mondo dove

tutto viene detto, codificato e sottoposto a un replay illimitato (p. 101) nei testi di DeLillo, in cui prolifera l'isomorfo ed è "l'identico ad avere vinto" (p. 123); la sconfitta della realtà, la perdita del senso del luogo, la temporalità senza memoria fanno prevalere il possibile sul reale nei *non-luoghi* virtuali dei romanzi di Michael Crichton.

Il denominatore comune passa da "non-avere-un-luogo" ad "avere-essere-un-corpo" che nel caso di Allende diventa l'aggregato sovraindividuale della famiglia. Calabrese scrive: "Il caso di Isabel Allende si genera negli anni Ottanta e Novanta attraverso un simultaneo, equilibrato potenziamento del ruolo dell'autore, del lettore e del testo" (p. 165), ma nel *tout-monde* della globalizzazione, ciò che avviene è che "il racconto procede nel senso dell'accumulo ripetitivo, dell'isomorfismo e dell'assonanza" (p. 179). Abbiamo la serie testuale, consanguinei isomorfi, comportamenti ereditari, in "forme macronarrative, *trusts* diegetici, *serials* genealogico-familiari" (p. 174).

È con Isabel Allende, e con citazione di numerosi nomi di scrittori sud-americani e infine di scrittori della diaspora indiana, che entra nel testo di Calabrese il realismo magico come "stile sostenibile per la rappresentazione romanzesca del mondo attuale" (p. 195). Va detto che l'ipotesi di Calabrese di una esemplarità di Rushdie per il romanzo globale, che lo assimila agli scrittori latino-americani, pur ammettendo l'India come "between etno-culturale" che "la globalizzazione trasforma in un terreno ad elevata produttività narrativa", gli fa offuscare, quando non ignorare, aspetti importanti dei testi rushdiani, degli altri scrittori dell'India – diaspora o meno – ed anche dell'Africa, dei Caraibi, e dello stesso realismo magico (definito "un frullato di morfologie comparate", p. 196). Mentre è vero che qualcosa "ha mutato le leggi sistemiche del genere romanzesco" (p. 206), non contemplando le vere dimensioni di quella che è stata chiamata da Zamora "a new youth of narrative", si offusca il quadro cui contribuiscono invece elementi di tipo socio-storico-antropologico originati là dove non vale – se non, eventualmente, come fenomeno di imitazione, in presenza appunto di quella "elevata produttività narrativa" – il profilo tutto americano disegnato da Calabrese. Altre le ragioni, altre le memorie culturali, altro l'uso dell'immaginazione nella produzione "globale" del genere-romanzo negli ultimi non venti bensì almeno cinquanta anni.

Rushdie è esemplare di un tipo di narrazione che non si sottrae al tentativo di attribuire un senso a quanto è accaduto: "I must work fast, faster than Sherazade, if I am to end up meaning – yes, meaning – something. I admit it: above all things, I fear absurdity" dice Saleem Sinai nell'incipit di *Midnight's Children* – un romanzo che ruota intorno al concetto polise-

mantico di memoria (o, come Rushdie stesso afferma in *Imaginary Homelands*, “a novel of memory and about memory”)¹ ed è profondamente legato alla storia dell’India contemporanea e alla tradizione indiana del racconto orale, caratterizzata da un peculiare “Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration” (*ivi*, p. 16).

Si tratta di una narrazione sincretica che, se da un lato tiene sempre ben presente il legame col proprio luogo d’origine, riflette, dall’altro, sulla complessa e problematica condizione esistenziale dell’immigrato. Ed è da questa condizione di *in-between-ness* che scaturiscono alcune delle più profonde riflessioni dello scrittore: “Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles” (*ivi*, p. 15). Ed ancora: “Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained” (*ivi*, p. 17).

Se è vero che il romanzo contemporaneo in inglese deve essere necessariamente considerato transnazionale e “cross-lingual”, non bisogna tuttavia dimenticare che non si tratta di strutture narrative all’insegna della omogeneizzazione e della perdita del senso, bensì della fusione sincretica, della trasformazione, della “cross-pollination” (“Migrants may well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge”, *ivi*, p. 210) e della costante ricerca di “new angles at which to enter reality”.

Mettere insieme realismo magico e fiaba, vedere nella letteratura per l’infanzia “un laboratorio della globalizzazione a venire” (p. 215) fa del realismo magico un fenomeno contemporaneamente più leggero e più “globale” di quanto non sia, trascura l’impegno politico, il senso della comunità, del luogo, della storia, il rinnovamento del linguaggio letterario in una produzione mondiale che include Australia e Canada, Caraibi e Africa, Brasile ed Uruguay, cioè paesi cosiddetti “post-coloniali” quanto l’India o l’Argentina.

Nonostante faccia lumeggiare vaghissima speranza in futuribili “negoziazioni discorsive che ripristino la coerenza”, Calabrese sembra ignorare la vasta produzione romanzesca coeva che ha trovato in quei luoghi, e con preciso senso del reale e del territorio, linguaggi letterari che potenziano

¹ S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), p. 10.

percorsi interpretativi di grande forza e coerenza, e soprattutto elude la riflessione legata a “the ethics of criticism and why literature matters”; come afferma Antor, “Literary texts [...] fulfil the definition of art in the words of Browning’s Fra Lippo Lippi:

Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out.”²

² Heinz Antor, “The Ethics of Criticism in the Age After Value” in *Why Literature Matters: Theories and Functions of Literature*, ed. by Rüdiger Ahrens and Laurenz Volkmann (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1996), p. 83.

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